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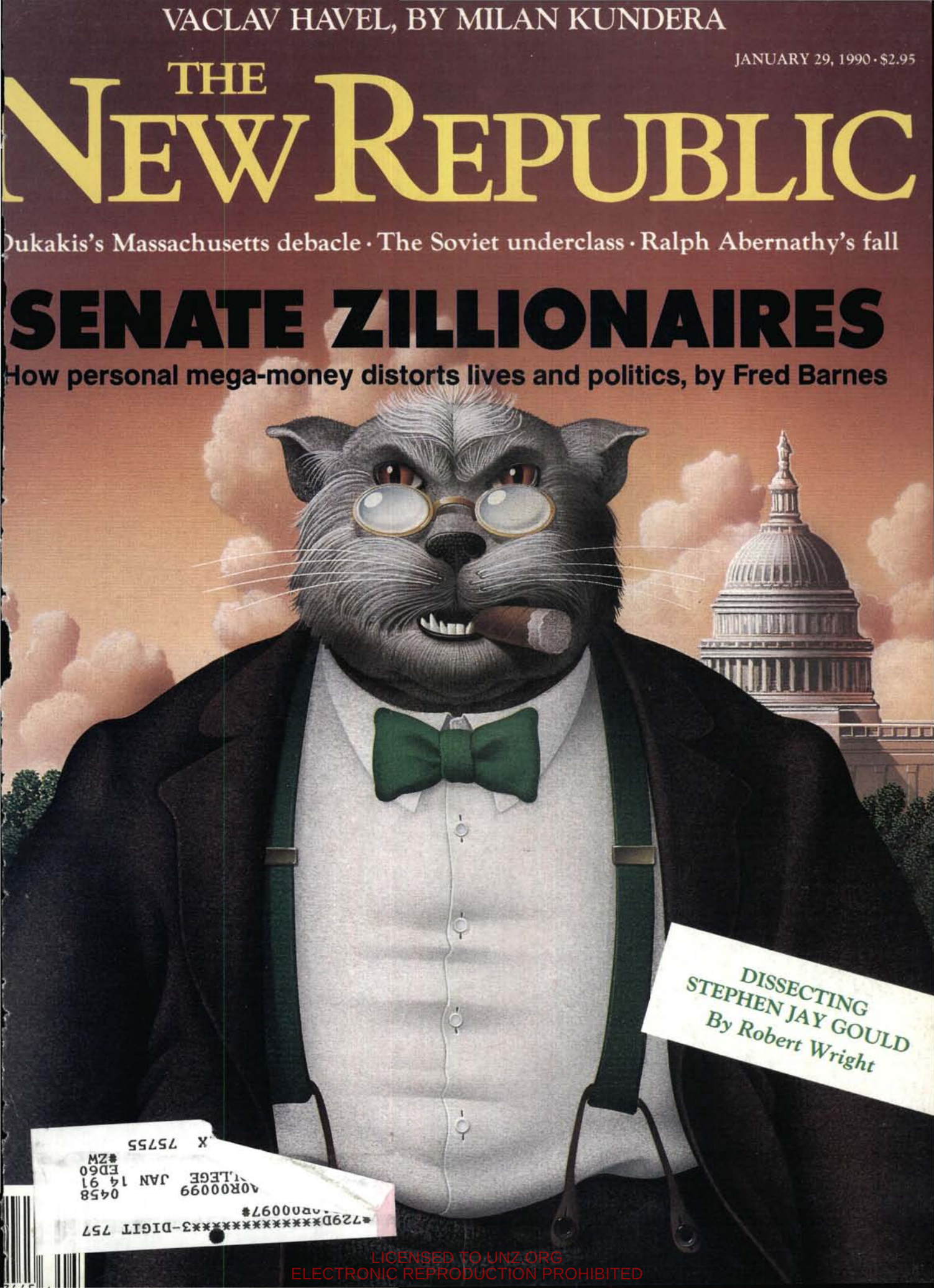

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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JANUARY 29, 1990

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FROM WASHINGTON

Two Japanese myths

Or rather, two American myths about Japan. It goes without saying, in the American policy debate, that however they do it in Japan is the right way to do it. But how, exactly, do they do it in Japan? About this there is confusion and misinformation. Two myths in particular are popular right now: that the Japanese have lower taxes, and that Japanese corporations have the unfair advantage of lower capital costs—access to cheaper money. These myths accompany apologetics for the performance of American industry, demands for new tax breaks for the affluent, and calls for more trade protectionism.

Tax systems are hard to summarize and hard to compare. But few American business executives would happily trade either their personal or their business tax bills for what they'd face in Japan. After standard deductions that are about equal to ours, the Japanese national income tax goes as high as 50 percent, on incomes over about $140,000. A second tax for local government hits a top rate of 16 percent at about $35,000. That's 66 percent, combined. By comparison the American income tax peaks at 33 percent on incomes of about $75,000 (for a married couple) and actually drops to 28 percent after $155,000. Adding even a high state income tax, the American top rate is less than two-thirds of the Japanese one. Japan recently instituted a three percent consumption tax—deeply controversial, because it hits ordinary people the hardest, although it is lower than a typical American state sales tax.

Japan does give special treatment, of a sort, to capital gains. There is an annual exemption of about $3,500. Profits on investments held more than five years get taxed at half the ordinary rate (which still means rates up to 33 percent, the current top American rate). Profits on real estate held less than ten years are socked with a ten percent tax surcharge. But sales of publicly traded stocks are handled in a complicated way that usually amounts to a mere one percent of the total sale price.

The Japanese inheritance tax starts at about $275,000 plus $55,000 per child (as in America, spouses are exempt), or $385,000 for a couple with two children. Rates go up to 70 percent, on estates over about $3.5 million. The American estate tax exempts the first $600,000, hits 55 percent on estates of $3.6 million, goes up to 60 percent at $10 million to $21 million, then drops to 55 percent again. Go figure. The American top rate will drop to 50 percent in 1993. Heirs in Japan who sell inherited property also pay full capital gains tax on the profit since it was purchased. In America, you only pay tax on the increase in value since you inherited it—a $5 billion a year loophole.

Effective corporate tax rates depend crucially on things like depreciation rules. After much juggling on both sides of the Pacific, the official corporate tax rates are similar: 37.5 percent in Japan, compared to 34 percent in the United States. The experts figure that the effective tax rate faced by corporations contemplating new investments is about the same as well.

The bottom line: the Japanese tax system is more progressive than ours. Although it contains a few special breaks for investors (notably the token tax on stock profits), overall it taxes capital, and the affluent in general, more heavily than we do.

The complaint that Japanese corporations have access to cheaper capital is peculiar on its face, coming at a time when Japanese money is flooding into the United States (a fact about which some of the same people also complain). It's certainly true that the Japanese save far more than we do, giving them more capital to invest. But who are these generous folks who are lending money to a company in Osaka for less than they could get by loaning the same money to a company in Chicago? And what's in it for them?

It's also certainly true that prevailing interest rates in yen are lower than interest rates in dollars. That's because there is less actual and projected inflation in the yen. Although a low inflation rate is good for any economy, it is no special advantage in borrowing: money borrowed in yen must be paid back in yen, too, when their value will have increased compared with the dollar. (Indeed, with an unindexed tax code, higher inflation is an advantage in borrowing; you get to deduct more "interest" even though your real expense is no higher than if inflation and interest rates were both lower.)

Among economists, a vast controversy swirls around the question of Japanese capital costs. The consensus seems to be that Japanese businesses can indeed borrow more cheaply, even after figuring for inflation, but that the difference is disappearing as capital markets become more efficient and international. Japan used to have limits on the export of capital and artificial restraints on what savers could be paid. This created a captive pool of cheap capital. But over the past decade, these rules have gradually been eliminated.

They have been eliminated, not as some kind of favor to America, but because this is good for Japan. The way to maximize the value of a high savings rate is to invest it for maximum return, not to lend at a discount. Japan's capital markets, like its other markets, may still reflect traditional practices and relationships (between corporations and their banks, for example) that give the local boys an advantage. But this just redistributes money within Japan, from savers to borrowers. It is no unfair advantage for Japanese society as a whole. Quite the reverse. It is as self-defeating as growing your own expensive rice instead of buying cheap rice from abroad. Borrowers (like farmers) benefit; savers (like consumers) suffer; society as a whole is worse off, not better.

A second aspect of the capital costs controversy concerns "equity": raising money by selling stock shares instead of borrowing. If there are two identical factories being built, one in Osaka and one in Chicago, investors will demand a greater stake in the Chicago factory than the Osaka one for every dollar or yen they put up. One recent study concluded that during the 1980s American companies had to earn twice as much as Japanese companies for each dollar they attracted in new equity.

Is this an unfair advantage for the Japanese? It's an advantage, to be sure. But, sadly, it is a consequence of America's relative industrial performance, not a cause of it. Investors simply feel that, in the long run, that factory in Osaka is a better bet than the one in Chicago, and are willing to pay more for a piece of the action. That includes American investors as well as Japanese, as anyone is now free to make that choice with a simple call to a broker.

A third question about capital costs concerns the mix of debt and equity. In both societies, it is cheaper to raise money by borrowing than by issuing stock, because owning a share is riskier than owning a bond, and shareholders must be compensated for the risk. Yet traditionally, Japanese companies had more debt and less equity than American companies. Unfair? If so, it's no longer true. Thanks to the explosion of American corporate debt and the huge rise in the Tokyo stock market (according to the most recent studies), Japan Inc.'s debt-equity ratio is now lower than America Inc.'s. In any event, this cultural anomaly hardly justifies a lot of new investment tax breaks since (drumroll, please) they don't do it that way in Japan.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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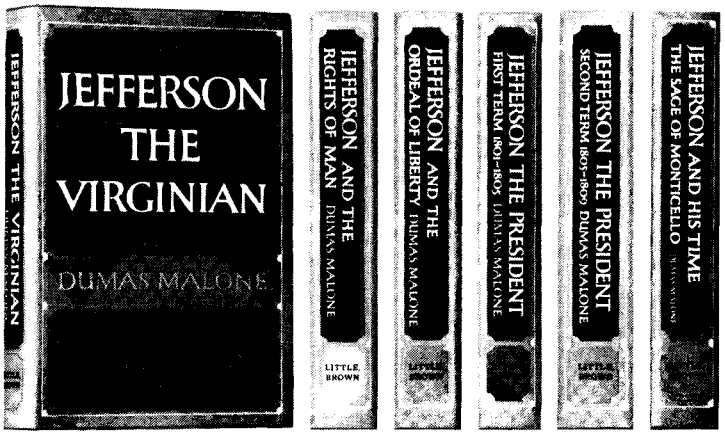

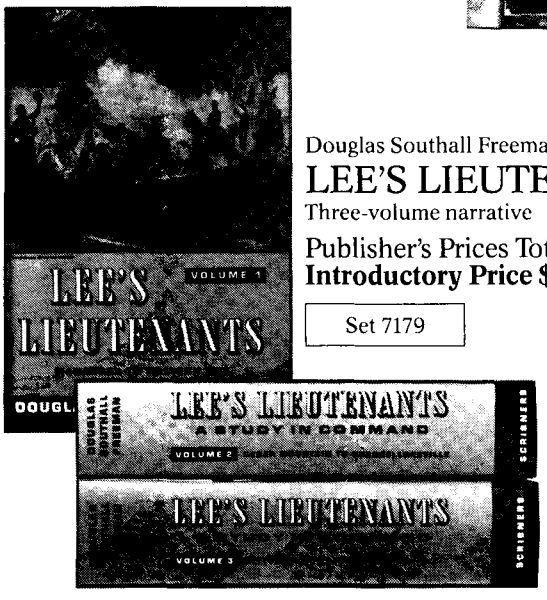

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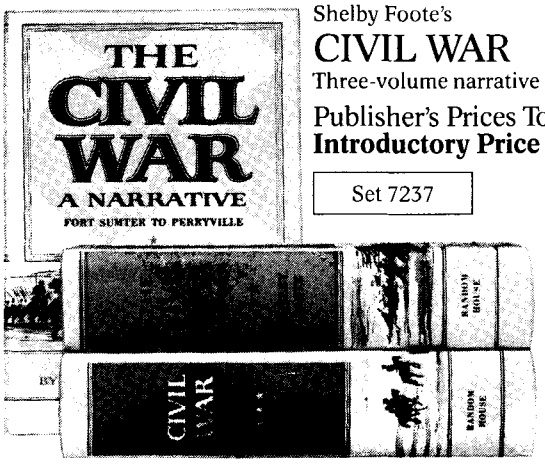

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CORRESPONDENCE

He ain't perfect

To the editors:

I sure would like to thank you folks on your article about Bob Kerrey ("Senator Perfect" by Jacob Weisberg, December 18). It told him some things I tried to tell him after he went way back East to Washington. I said, "Bob" (we're kinda simple folk on names out here—not a J. Danforth Anything in sight), "if you want to amount to anything back there in D.C., you're just gonna have to follow the rules they play by.

"First off, you're gonna have to get sophisticated about the Soviets, and the Germans, and all those other folk with funny-sounding names. You're gonna have to have a 'policy.' It doesn't matter that the Russkies and Poles and Hungarians and the like have thrown the idea of 'policy' into a cocked hat. It doesn't matter how stupid the 'policy' is. Just have a 'policy.'

"Second, when anybody asks you about politics, don't tell 'em what you really think. Just tell 'em about Midwestern populism. Talk about William Jennings Bryan and Crosses of Gold, or George Norris and running as an independent—and losing. Don't talk about La Follette, though. He was one of those Easterners from Wisconsin.

"Third, you gotta watch out about all those folks rating you. You better start building those coalitions and start articulating like hell. And be real careful that you develop an analytic bent. Nobody in Washington is worth a damn if they don't have one. And it doesn't matter that you're smart as all get out. You better spend at least one week a month mastering details.

"And for God's sake, Bob, don't let anybody get the idea that being a Senator, or, heaven forbid, something else, is not the be-all and end-all of your life. Hell, if they find that out, they'll probably figure that you won't compromise your beliefs or principles just to keep being a Senator. Then what'll you have left except your honesty."

Did he listen? Of course not. That's the trouble with Nebraskans—we have this nasty habit of doing what we think is right, despite advice to the contrary. See, out here we all know Bob is smart, and honest, and he talks straight, and has a good idea of what America should stand for, and he doesn't think he is the only one who can save the world, or that he is the only one who has all the answers.

But I'm really glad that Weisberg has straightened out the country on Bob Kerrey's biggest flaw. It's something that everyone should know about him, so they know he sure as hell ain't "Senator Perfect." It's something we in Nebraska have known for a long time. There is no doubt at all that Bob Kerrey can't sing worth a damn.

JOHN P. MURPHY
North Platte, Nebraska

No heart for Chile

To the editors:

Tina Rosenberg's dour piece on Chile's elections ("Fall of the Patriarch," December 11) shows that proximity doesn't always improve perception. She may live in Chile, but her heart is clearly elsewhere. That country has just witnessed a relatively peaceful transition compared with what was needed to dislodge dictatorship in Romania, yet all Rosenberg sees is gloom. Even her language describing the campaign advertising is stilted.

I was in Chile in October to meet with leading political operatives, journalists, academics, and students. I cannot reconcile Rosenberg's observations with what I heard and saw. More dismaying still is her thinly veiled skepticism about democracy's prospects in Latin American countries. I was in Spain during the transition from Franco to what is now a very vigorous democracy. Judging from this piece, had Rosenberg been reporting from Madrid in the 1970s, she would have been equally fearful—and wrong—about Spanish democracy.

JOHN B. ROBERTS II
Alexandria, Virginia

Back to the futures

To the editors:

James J. Cramer blames a host of ills on "bear raids" caused by "program traders at the large securities firms," who can stampede gullible investors thanks to a blanket exemption from the uptick rule ("Basket Case," November 13). But no such blanket exemption has ever existed. An exemption applies to only "one one-thousandth of one percent," says Blair Corkran of the Securities and Exchange Commission. As described in the *Wall Street Journal*, an SEC letter to Merrill Lynch in 1986 allows program traders to sell a stock short in the absence of an uptick only if the firm has "an economic equivalent of the shares themselves—for example, through ownership of options or convertible preferred stock."

Numerous academic studies have ab-

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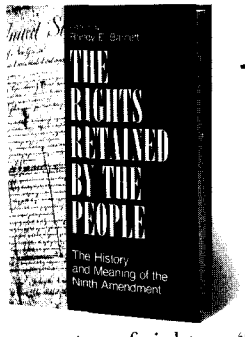

Robert Bork compared it to an inkblot.

Warren Burger couldn't recall what it said. Yet the Ninth Amendment's simple guarantee of rights—"The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people"—may be the key to the meaning of the entire Constitution, as envisioned by the Framers. 416 pp/$22.95

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JANUARY 29, 1990

ANNUAL CHECK-UP

In January 1989 George Bush stood on the Capitol steps, took the oath of office, and told the nation that "a new breeze is blowing" throughout the world. These words had been provided by speechwriter Peggy Noonan, but no one can deny that Bush knows a lot about breezes firsthand. Over the years his ideology has proved keenly responsive to prevailing winds. Consider the year since his inauguration: his overall course has been set by an obedience to opinion polls, often tempered a bit by his strong sense of caution. Of course, this leadership style could equally well be described in more flattering terms. Noonan might say that prudence is the President's anchor and democracy his sail. Or something like that.

However this approach to governance is labeled, we must concede at the outset that in some areas it has worked fairly well. Bush's natural inclination to do nothing major, along with the public's yearning for action, has amounted, for example, to a sensible stance toward the crumbling Soviet bloc. The Administration seems to be moving briskly and competently toward reductions in nuclear and conventional arms. Yet while Bush is eager to hand the electorate a peace dividend, complete with cuts in NATO forces, caution counsels him against presiding over NATO's dismantling—good advice at a time when Europe badly needs stable overarching structures. Aside from this military retrenchment and some no-cost economic overtures, Bush's response to *perestroika* has been confined to moral support and trying not to get in the way. Given the many imponderables in the Soviet Union, and the sheer size of its economic mess, that is just about all he can usefully do. In some Eastern European nations, with much smaller economies than Russia's and a much greater commitment to economic reform, there *is* an opportunity for fruitful assistance. And there Bush, initially cautious about giving any substantial help, has been prodded into offering meaningful, if still inadequate, aid by editorialists and by Democrats who tried to make an issue of his stinginess.

As a general rule, slavish attention to public opinion is a dangerous thing in foreign policy. But in Bush's case it may be better than the alternative. Reflect for a moment on the one time he struck out boldly on his own: his pursuit of early rapprochement with China in the wake of the mass murder at Tiananmen Square, an indefensible move in both moral and practical terms. (And please, don't buy into the line that the Panama intervention—for all its merits—represented a radically new Bush, willing to step out and lead; there is no surer way, in the short run, for a President to raise his approval rating than to get the nation involved in a shooting war.)

Obviously, Bush's generally clean foreign policy record doesn't place him in the first rank of 20th-century world leaders. When history hands you the end of the cold war as an inauguration present, it's hard to come off looking too badly during your first year in office. Still, the important thing is that there is not yet any reason to believe he will look any worse in the long run; historians in the year 2020 may well judge Bush's foreign policy favorably.

The same cannot be said about domestic policy. Two great challenges face any leader of a democracy. One is to protect the public interest against the centrifugal pull of special interests. The other is to lengthen the time horizons of the often shortsighted polity. Here Bush has gone 0 for 2. The one domestic policy he is pursuing with passion—a capital-gains tax cut—is a gift for the Republican Party's favorite interest group, and a costly one. The long-run drop in revenues that a cut will bring would be regrettable in any event, but especially

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so at a time when the real budget deficit (not to be confused with the official, phony one, which includes the Social Security surplus and assorted accounting tricks) is sizable.

Which brings us to the question of time horizons. The list of ills being ignored at the nation's eventual peril is by now familiar: the ongoing decay of the physical infrastructure, of the intellectual infrastructure (e.g., public education), and of the underclass. Each of these is important enough to get Bush convicted of negligence by future historians, but it is the last count that will surely bring the harshest sentence. Perhaps it's a slight exaggeration to say that the culture of poverty now festering in the cities threatens to destroy the nation by the middle of the next century; a nation racially and economically polarized in the extreme, after all, can survive as a political entity. But it can't survive as a truly coherent entity, or as a source of moral leadership in the world, or as a legitimate source of national pride.

Bush seems vaguely aware of the problem. "There are the children who have nothing," he reminded us all one year ago. "There are those who cannot free themselves of enslavement to whatever addiction—drugs, welfare, the demoralization that rules the slums." But, he added, "The old solution, the old way, was to think that public money alone could end these problems. . . . We have learned that that is not so. And in any case, our funds are low."

What nonsense. The only reason funds are low is that Bush, in a fit of election-year pandering, vowed to keep them that way. And though he is right to say that public money alone can't help the underclass, there can't be real help without money, and lots of it. The necessary, and pricey, medicine has been prescribed in these pages before. (See "The Work Ethic State" by Mickey Kaus, TNR, July 7, 1986, and "Gaining Ground," TNR, July 11, 1988.) First, every able-bodied welfare recipient, including single mothers with young children, should be told to get a job. That means the government must, among other things: find or provide jobs for those who don't find them on their own; subsidize essential training; and provide child care for poor working mothers—excellent child care, as educationally rich as Head Start, but beginning at a younger age.

One response to the obvious question—Where would Bush find the support for anything so expensive?—is that this is Bush's problem, and if he wants to go down in the books as a leader rather than as a second-rate steward, he'll solve it. But here are some clues. (1) Though the above program has something for both the left and the right to hate (the end of the safety net for the idle, and a huge government expenditure on the poor, respectively), it also has something for both to love (ditto, except in reverse). (2) The widespread alarm over the inner-city drug epidemic could be turned into fuel for an attack on the epidemic's root causes if Bush chose to cultivate the public's compassion rather than stoke its authoritarianism.

The other widespread alarm that could feed neatly into an assault on the culture of poverty is the amply warranted concern over public education. If a workfare program ever does succeed in at least partly restoring a work ethic in the most desperate urban neighborhoods, this triumph will be of little lasting value in the absence of good schools, which are essential in converting ambition into a marketable commodity. The Bush Administration let the education budget drop in real terms between 1989 and 1990 and, as a decoy, proposed a dinky $400 million educational initiatives package that the House of Representatives rightly refused to take seriously. Yes, yes, we know: educators have proved themselves adept at wasting money. But reform at the state level over the past decade has provided some good lessons in how to spend money wisely. The Bush Administration's favorite attractively priced (i.e., free) palliative—giving parents the choice of which public schools their children should attend—probably does as much harm as good, ultimately, and in any event is a sad admission of the failure to provide uniformly good schools.

Bush's reluctance thus far to bring real leadership to domestic policy is all the more tragic in view of his popularity. He has assiduously built up a large reserve of political capital, and he shows every sign of planning to carry it to the grave.

"We know what works," Bush told the nation a year ago. "Freedom works. We know what's right: freedom is right. We know how to secure a more just and prosperous life for man on earth: through free markets, free speech, free elections, and the exercise of free will unhampered by the state." Actually, reality is a little more complicated than that. Which is why a President's prudence, if he has any, should serve as a rudder, not an anchor.

NOTEBOOK

TUT TUTU: It is not hard to understand why Archbishop Desmond Tutu measures the world in South African terms, why conflicts and crises around the world remind him overwhelmingly of apartheid. And yet it is important to observe that these natural comparisons may be wrong, obtuse, hurtful. In Israel for Christmas, Tutu spoke with passion about his support for the Palestinian cause—and then proceeded to equate the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza with apartheid. "We are aware that the Israeli government is very sensitive over suggestions that it treats Palestinians the way the South African government has treated black South Africans, but our faith compels us to state what we perceive to be the truth. . . ." Never mind the sensitivities of governments; it is the duty of religious leaders not to take them into account. The problem with Tutu's analogy is not that it offends the government, but that it offends the truth. The blacks of South Africa have suffered much worse, surely, than a relatively benign occupation that resulted from a war of self-defense, and that has been

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actively opposed from its inception by substantial segments of the occupying population. Indeed, the argument for territorial compromise—it is advanced by approximately half of Israel—is made precisely to prevent the situation in the territories from turning South African. And then Tutu further upped the spiritual and political ante, unconscionably. He exhorted Israelis to pray for, and to forgive, the Nazis, so that the Israelis "in turn will not make others suffer." Is Tutu worried that Israelis are behaving like Nazis? Then he understands little about the Holocaust, too. Nor do we hear Tutu exhorting the blacks of South Africa to pray for and forgive, say, Hendrik Verwoerd. The archbishop is twisting history, and barging into somebody else's sorrow. If God is in the details, men of God should get them right.

DEVIL OF A SOURCE: Now that Nicolae Ceausescu has been put on permanent deep background, *Newsweek* has chosen to publish off-the-record comments he made praising Stalin in an interview last summer. The newsmagazine's editors will probably be criticized for violating the taboo against betraying sources, as they were in 1987 for fingering Oliver North as the leaker of a story about the *Achille Lauro* intercept (when he accused innocent members of Congress of spilling the beans). Instead, they deserve credit for recognizing that deals struck with sources are not absolute and immutable. There is no justification for agreements that serve only to deceive or keep information from the public. One can't imagine any way that protecting Ceausescu would serve the public's interest. But for this reason, *Newsweek* should never have agreed to keep secret anything he said. If he had bragged—off the record, of course—about killing 50 dissidents before breakfast, would the magazine have remained silent? It is interesting to know now that Stalin was Ceausescu's role model. Back when he was in power the information actually might have been useful.

POT AND KETTLE DEPT.: The Ohio Governor's race hasn't even started yet, and already it has turned into an abortion flop fest. Three candidates are backing off the newly unpopular pro-life positions they staked out years back, while accusing each other of inconsistency. First Republican Robert Taft II "clarified" his pro-life position, coming out for public funding in cases of rape or incest. Taft criticized his opponent, Cleveland Mayor George Voinovich, for being too hard-line on the issue. Voinovich responded by saying that Taft was trying "to pick up some points in a Republican primary." Then Democrat Anthony Celebrezze Jr., the Ohio Attorney General who recently supported a constitutional amendment to recognize the fetus as a human being, said he now believes women should have the right to choose until the fetus becomes

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viable. ("I don't debate it. I happen to think it's murder," he once said.) Voinovich promptly pounced, using a spokesman to call Celebrezze's switch a "shocking reversal," according to the *Washington Post*. "Here's a person who says he wants to run on his record, then the first thing he does is run away from his record." And that's exactly what Voinovich himself did. A few days later he "modified" his own life-of-the-mother-only stance to include rape and incest. "I think what we have to do is realize that we're in the real world," he said. Backpedal to the metal.

PLACES IN THE HEARTLAND: "As for life inside the Beltway, don't come here," former Reagan domestic policy adviser Gary Bauer recently advised a conference of young conservatives (see "All Rightniks" by Daniel Gross and David P. Hamilton, TNR, January 22). "The values are warped. If I could find a way to make a living, I'd be back in the heartland in a minute." Yeah, right. Bauer easily could match the $80,000 he earns as president of the Family Research Council as a university professor or in business somewhere "out there." He stays because of the prestige, the heady proximity to power, and media attention he wouldn't command in Gopher Prairie. Why doesn't Bauer just admit that what keeps him here is his fervent devotion to public service—like any normal Washingtonian?

HOW WE LOST OUR HEAD: For those of you puzzled by the title over the article by Scott McConnell and Eric Breindel, "Head To Come" (TNR, January 8 & 15), it was not one of our more obscure puns. The correct headline, "Inclusion Illusion," got sidetracked in last-minute production chaos, and never found its way to the page. Our apologies to the authors, and to our readers. •

WASHINGTON SCENE

JARGONAUT

By Alex Heard

I retired from competitive English majoring ten years ago, but let's grease the old Smith-Corona, roll in some Erasable Bond, and see if I've still got it. My paper's title is "The Modern Language Association's Annual Convention: A Journey through 'The Academy of Lagado'?: Swift's Pedantic (Dys)topia as Contemporary Thematic Grid." Mmm, not bad. The huffy, colon-linked phrases give a false sense of grandeur, and the reference to the insane professors in the often-skipped Book Three of *Gulliver's Travels* is a nice bit of arcana-chucking. Unfortunately, the concept I'm getting at—that the MLA is all baloney, that its participants stumble around like Professor Irwin Corey, bumping walls, shedding dandruff, speaking in academic glossolalia—is an overworked cliché. If you read press accounts of the past 20 years of MLA conventions, you'll see many pieces in which a reporter ventures into this mammoth gathering of literature and language scholars and "discovers" the presence of people whose words he does not understand. Quoting a few dumb-sounding session titles and using phrases like "academia nuts" and "Tower of Babel," he argues that the MLA has been overtaken by crackpots who have made English teaching unsafe for those who dare to talk sense. The original villains were profs who produced fussy, fragmented scholarship. In recent years they've been replaced by the literary theorists and feminists.

I'm not saying such types weren't on display at MLA 1989, which was held in Washington between Christmas and New Year's. They were. But in fairness to the memory of your cherished English teachers, please keep two things in mind. One, most English profs still make sense. At the MLA they sometimes make less sense than they ought to, but this is usually because the MLA is, after all, a meeting at which specialists speak to other specialists. Sure, things get rarefied, but what should we expect them to talk about, "The Theme of Man vs. Nature in *Moby Dick*"? Two, don't worry about a particular sect conquering the English profession, because any such group will find that it has planted the flagstaff of victory on a hungry amoeba the size of Stone Mountain.

There were 10,000 academics at this year's MLA, and in 750 sessions, 2,500 of them delivered papers representing every imaginable point of view: poststructuralist, deconstructionist, New Historicist, New Formalist, Neo-New Criticismist, and so on. Feminists were overrepresented, but so what? A lot of them made good points, and the ones who didn't seemed fringe-entrapped. For example, I audited one session in which women said nasty things about The Bard. (Sorry, make that: The Codpiece-Wearing Jerk.) Their argument was that undergraduate study of Shakespeare is a brainwashing technique of the patriarchy. "Students come in to bow down to the presumed genius of the phallic 'master,' " said one panelist, who urged her audience to help undercut the existing order by teaching Shakespeare in a way that "demystifies" him. Pretty stupid, but midway through the session there occurred an event that demonstrated this sect's essential pathos: a bored photographer shuffled in to take shots of the panelists for a newsletter—something that happens at every convention, everywhere—and the session participants became genuinely alarmed. You'd have thought industry goons were busting in to horsewhip Emma Goldman. "He's *probably* from the FBI," one panelist

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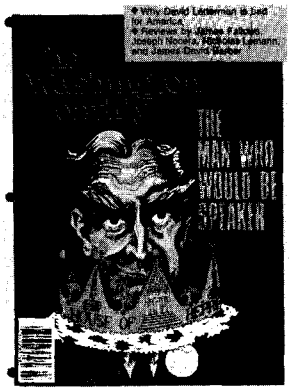
WE KNEW WRIGHT FROM THE START



Three years before the downfall of House Speaker Jim Wright, *The Washington Monthly* warned its readers: "If Tip O'Neill seems like the sort of guy who would write out a taxpayer endorsed check to everyone who tried to sell him swampland in Florida, Jim Wright seems more like the guy selling the land."

And that's not the first time we anticipated the news that would later make headlines . . .

➥ In a story we ran six years *before* the Challenger disaster, we warned that the space shuttle was unsafe, saying, "Here's the plan. Suppose one of the solid-fueled boosters fails. The plan is, you die."

➥ Seven months *before* the stock market crash in 1987, we warned that the programmed trading and low-margin stock options could turn a bad day into Black Monday.

➥ Months *before* the Iran-Contra scandal broke in newspapers, we warned readers, "This National Security Council staff is the worst in history."

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shuddered. And she was only half joking.

My goal was to sample a range of offerings that wouldn't necessarily lead to a "coherent" experience—sort of like my undergraduate education. As it happened, the first session I attended was nonsense, and it could be argued that, despite my pretensions of fairness, I went looking for trouble. But the choice seemed so clear. Faced with "Modernism-Postmodernism Dialectics: The German Difference," "Untold Horrors: Problems of Narration in the Gothic," and "The Muse of Masturbation," where would you go? Many others did, too. This packed session had that air of giddy horniness that also seems to be a universal constant at conventions, and the session leader, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick of Duke, built on this with an intro filled with "bawdy" ramblings on the irony that scholars—people sometimes accused of "mental masturbation"—were here talking about literature vis-à-vis, teeheehee, "The Pocket Muse."

Much of the discussion was old stuff: masturbo-imagery in Whitman and Melville, for example. But Paula Bennett of Northeastern University jolted the crowd with her assertion that the hidden strategy of Emily Dickinson's poetry is: using encoded images of clitoral masturbation to transcend sex-role limitations imposed by the 19th-century patriarchy. The basic idea was that Dickinson loaded her work with references to peas, crumbs, and flower buds in order to broadcast secret messages of forbidden onanistic delights to other female illuminati. "Why does she write in such short, explosive sentences?" asked Bennett. "The style is clitoral, as far as I'm concerned." She cited some poems, including one in which Emily spies a bird coming down a walk and, Bennett believes, experiences auto-ecstasy when the bird takes flight. You be the judge: "I offered him a crumb / And he unrolled his feathers / And rowed him softer home— / Than Oars divide the Ocean, / Too silver for a seam— / Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon / Leap, plashless as they swim."

After this I avoided cheap shots, skipping "Esperanto: An Opportunity for Research" and "Shakespeare and Fetishism" and a man named Michael Awkward on "The Black Male's Place(s) in Black Feminist Criticism." I did, however, backslide with a paper called "*Room 222* and the Significance of the Black Subject." (Summary: Mr. Dixon, the history teacher in the 20-year-old television series, represented middle-class blacks. Jason represented angry ghetto blacks. Bernie, who I've always felt represented the tragedy of red-haired white guys who grow humongous Afros, was not discussed.)

Between easy sessions on legal diction and children's literature ("Dr. Seuss's Outsider, Horton's Triumph"), I faced up to the challenge of literary theory at a session titled "Toward the New Formalism: Formalist Approaches to Renaissance New Historicism and Feminism." Sure enough, just as I'd always heard, the theorists called books "texts" and were hard to follow. I had even boned up beforehand by plowing through a beginner's anthology on literary theory. For the benefit of you who are new to this, it explained that literary theorists, following the lead of Derrida, Foucault, and others, believe language in the hands of a so-called "master of words" is similar to (sorry if this simplifies your work too much, anthology editors, but it helped me to think of it this way) a car with Mr. Magoo behind the wheel. He *thinks* he knows what he's doing, but "pedestrians" (readers) see otherwise and react accordingly. Put another way: words have a life of their own, and create meanings in the reader's mind that the author may not have intended. . . . Interesting, but in actual listening conditions about as useful as a Norwegian phrase book. Fluent lit-theory practitioners play hardball in the conference room, speaking in daisy-chained clauses studded with killer jargon. These obliterate the layman. Among the phrases I got down before giving up entirely: "derivation from the deconstruction of Kantian formalism," "the shift from expressive to structured totality cannot *ground* mediation," and this beauty: "History can be totalized when being reified only if it moves into the *absence* of the real."

To repeat. I support the right of English profs to talk like this, and don't consider it a "threat." Still, one has to wonder if mumbo jumbo's era is waxing or waning. That depends on whom you ask, of course, but judging by MLA '89 it seems to be still going strong and headed for new mutations in the '90s. A fine, self-lashing session called "The Way We Write: Critical Style as a Professional Issue" was sparsely attended. In stark contrast was a Friday morning panel on a new topic that, to the surprise of its moderator, was standing room only. "Next year we'll have to get a bigger room," she exulted. "We had no idea this would be of so much interest." The topic? "Chaos Theory and Literature."

ALEX HEARD is a frequent contributor.

The Duke can't begin to clean it up.

UNHOLY MASS.

By Joseph Nocera

NORTHAMPTON, MASSACHUSETTS

There was never anything miraculous about the Massachusetts Miracle. It only seemed that way at the time. Like all sudden economic upsurges, the new prosperity seemed to grow not from any well-laid foundation, but rather to arrive out of nowhere, fully formed. One day the streets are lined with boarded-up factories, development is moribund, unemployment is in double digits,

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McDonald's is paying minimum wage. The next day (or so it seems) those factories have been converted into upscale mini-malls or subdivided into slick offices, housing entrepreneurial start-ups. The sky is dotted with construction cranes. Unemployment is the lowest in the country. McDonald's has signs in the window pleading, "Help Wanted. $7.50 an Hour. Benefits." *Benefits,* for crying out loud!

In the giddiness of the moment, most people tend not to dwell on the reasons for their newfound prosperity. I noticed this in Texas in the early 1980s, where the citizenry did backward somersaults to avoid admitting that the boom was based entirely on the price of oil. In Massachusetts the psychology was a little different. The state's economy had sunk so low in the 1970s that people were afraid to examine the reasons for their good fortune too scrupulously. They were afraid it was all a mirage, that it would vanish if they looked too closely. Only after the boom was over did the causes become obvious. This is also the usual pattern.

As everyone knows by now, Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis based his brief, painful national political career on the idea that *he* was the cause, or at least his particular brand of activist good government. With the state now facing an $825 million shortfall, its bond rating lower than even Louisiana's (a fact that deeply offends everyone in the state), this notion has now been rather embarrassingly discredited. But the truth is, nobody in Massachusetts ever bought that line at the time.

The Dukakis explanation didn't begin to explain something that was obvious in New England: it wasn't just Massachusetts that was doing well, but the entire region. Most emphatically, this included New Hampshire, a state governed by Dukakis's most hated rival, John Sununu, and run on "the best government is the least government" principles that were anathema to the Duke. Also, it was fairly clear, even at the time, that Massachusetts began to get healthy during the early-'80s term of Republican Governor Ed King, the man who interrupted the Duke's two terms. The vocal anti-tax-ites in Massachusetts like to say that the passage of Proposition 2½, which King supported and which made local property tax increases nearly impossible, was the real reason for the Massachusetts Miracle. But that's not true either.

Massachusetts prospered for most of the 1980s because the region's economy was uniquely positioned to take advantage of most of the economic crosscurrents that swept through the decade. This was more a matter of luck than foresight. For instance, the bull market of the 1980s combined with the "institutionalization" of the markets was perfect for Massachusetts. The mutual fund had been invented in the state, and as more and more people chose mutual funds instead of individual stocks as the way to play the market, Massachusetts companies like Fidelity Investments grew geometrically. The Reagan defense buildup was likewise tailor-made for Massachusetts: money and contracts poured into the universities and defense firms. The national computer boom allowed the region's large computer companies to expand furiously. A little piece of unnoticed legislation called the Historic Preservation Tax Credit made it suddenly profitable for developers to begin converting New England's long-unused mills and factories into chic offices. (It didn't hurt that brick was suddenly hip.) Unlike the Rustbelt, whose major industry (steel) has crumbled only in the last decade, Massachusetts's large manufacturers (mainly textiles) left the state 30 years ago. The state had a much longer time to transform itself into a service-based economy, and was thus prepared for the service-dominated '80s. And so on.

Similarly, Massachusetts's sudden fall from grace now has mainly to do with the economic currents heading in the opposite direction. The peace dividend may be wonderful for the world, but it's already been terrible for Massachusetts. The market crash in 1987 caused a retrenchment in the mutual fund industry that hasn't ended yet. Most painfully, almost all of the computer companies that ring Route 128, with the exception of Digital Equipment, are probably doomed. It is hard to say why this has happened exactly, especially since Silicon Valley seems relatively stable. It's almost as if the Massachusetts computer companies went into a collective slumber, and now that they are waking up, it's too late.

Wang has laid off thousands of employees (including the company president, who is the founder's son), but it is still, alas, making products no one wants. Apollo and Prime, formerly major players in the minicomputer business, have been sold and are shrinking fast. Data General is going nowhere. Etc. Etc.

And of course one company's problems have a way of snowballing into the larger economy—that's also part of the usual passachusetts. A computer company's advertising firm decides that business is too shaky to move into a fancy new skyscraper. As the building goes unleased, the developer falls behind at the bank, then the bank finds it has more and more "problem loans" on its books—and "suddenly" Bank of New England is announcing a loss well in excess of $100 million and its chairman is beating a hasty retreat into retirement. Or: state government comes up with revenue projections based on the continuation of the same growing economy that existed last year and the year before, except that the economy isn't growing, and so the revenues begin to fall short of projection. Pretty soon the shortfall has grown quite large, and "suddenly" the state is thrown into a fiscal crisis. To be fair, it is not Dukakis's fault that tax revenues have fallen so short. Which is somewhat different from saying that he doesn't deserve the scorn that is being heaped on him right now in Massachusetts.

The degree to which the Governor is reviled is really quite remarkable. His disapproval rating, around 80 percent, would be staggering even if he hadn't been a Presidential candidate in 1988. His run for President, which usually kindles pride instead of resentment,

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makes it even more astonishing. But people in Massachusetts now firmly believe that Dukakis sold them down the river during his campaign. So dependent were his Presidential prospects on the theme of the Massachusetts Miracle (so the argument goes) that he papered over the state's growing budget problems in order to put the best face on things for the nation. Then, months after the Presidential election, when he finally conceded that there were problems, it was much too late to do anything without inflicting real pain. Almost everyone now expects their taxes to go up, and they blame Dukakis.

It's hard to know if this argument is valid (it seems just as likely that the state would be in the same predicament even if the Duke hadn't papered over the deficit), but it is certainly fair to say that since he's been back he's done everything wrong. First, he announced that he wouldn't run for re-election, thus turning himself, prematurely, into a lame duck. Then, when he announced the budget shortfall, he made it sound as though this were a new problem that had just been brought to his attention. When he submitted his budget to the legislature, it was openly mocked and dismissed almost immediately. With the same hubris that helped lose him the White House, he has yet to admit to any mistakes, and he's gotten into unseemly spats with legislators who should be his allies. He has failed to point to one program that could be abolished, even though dozens of new ones were created during the good times. After the legislature demanded that he pare the bureaucracy, Dukakis responded with layoffs that run not into the thousands but into the very low hundreds. When his wife, Kitty, suffered her alcoholic relapse a few months ago, people were openly hoping that he would take the opportunity to resign. Two years ago he was the most powerful Democrat in the country. Today he's irrelevant in his own state.

The end of the Massachusetts Miracle has also exposed, at last, the moral bankruptcy of initiatives like Proposition 2½. When 2½ first passed a decade ago, there was a round of belt-tightening in every community in the state. There was some pain, but it was manageable: the privatization of garbage collection was a typical response. Soon there was no pain at all. The reason is that as the economy expanded, state revenues were increasingly used to cover up local shortfalls. Every community in the state became hooked on state money, and people began to think that they could keep a full array of services, without having to pay for them. But it was a delusion. When the state ran out of money, cities suddenly discovered they were broke, and were helpless to do anything because of the restrictions of Prop 2½. As a result, vital services are being cut. In Springfield nearly a third of the teachers have been laid off. It is hard to imagine a more destructive act.

The two big newspapers, the *Boston Herald* and the *Globe*, haven't helped much either. As the state has become increasingly polarized—between those who hold night vigils in support of higher taxes and those who oppose any and all new taxes—so have the papers. Leading the anti-tax charge is the *Herald*, which, as the feisty tabloid, has obvious economic reasons for taking that stance. It plays well to its constituency. The *Herald* has had a field day exposing waste and misgovernment, all of which is gleefully laid at the feet of the paper's favorite punching bag: Dukakis. The chief exposer is a columnist named Howie Carr, who has made his reputation revealing "hacks" on the public payroll. (As Carr seems to define it, a hack is anyone who is related to anyone else on the public payroll.) Carr is a notorious bully, a cheap-shot artist whose columns are filled with ad hominem attacks (he calls Ted Kennedy "Fat Boy," for instance), but he is a very funny bully, and that is the source of his power. He seems to have the entire legislature cowed.

He also has had a surprisingly powerful effect on the *Globe*. Rather than try to sniff out any waste and mismanagement itself—which used to be a *Globe* staple—the paper seems to be taking the position that anything Carr favors it must oppose, more or less on principle. So the *Globe*'s response to the fiscal crisis has been to run interminable articles on certain huge budget items such as state Medicaid payments—the implication being that so much of the budget is fixed that only higher taxes can solve the crisis. It has also run paeans to a number of the "hack families" Carr has savaged. Here the point seems to be that just because a family has ten members on the public payroll, that doesn't mean they aren't genuinely public spirited. Most astonishingly, it has published several attacks on Carr himself, claiming that his rantings have prevented the legislature from doing the responsible thing—which in the *Globe* view means raising taxes.

What neither paper has done—what, indeed, no one in the state has done—is take a close, hard look at the state's programs themselves, in an effort to decide what is fat and what is bone. Can the state still afford the various "innovation centers" Dukakis made so much of during his run for the Presidency? Have they done any good? Nobody knows. The state has long planned to "revive" the depressed town of North Adams, in western Massachusetts, by turning an old factory into the world's largest conceptual art museum. This was always a slightly nutty idea, with a very slim chance of succeeding. Yet it's still in the budget—at $45 million—fiscal crisis or not. When pushed to make cuts, the administration's typical response has been to withhold money from the state universities, already badly squeezed, and force *them* to make the hard decisions.

Carr and the *Herald*, meanwhile, seem content to stand apart from the fray, chuckling at the hacks and calling Dukakis names, like kids in a playground taunting the gawkiest among them. They're having fun watching Massachusetts go down the tubes. That people read Carr so religiously is a testament to their belief that Dukakis still isn't playing it straight with them. The sad part is, there is really nothing Dukakis can do or say to change that perception. What Massachusetts needs

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most right now is someone who can credibly stand up and say, "This is what has to be done." Back in the good times, that described the Duke. But it doesn't anymore, and it won't again.

JOSEPH NOCERA is a columnist for *Esquire.*

Memories of the legendary fixer.

PAUL CORBIN, R.I.P.

By Ken Bode

When Robert F. Kennedy ran for U.S. Senate from New York in 1964, he was told he could have the endorsement of Liberal Party leader Alex Rose on condition that Paul Corbin, Kennedy's shadowy henchman, not be allowed in the state. Thus exiled, Corbin installed himself in a hotel across the river in New Jersey and went to work. Before long the management ordered him evicted. So many telephone lines had been installed in his suite that hotel officials became convinced they were hosting a bookie.

Corbin, who died on January 2 at the age of 75, earned many other banishments through his years of campaigning, consulting, and scheming, during which his reputation grew to the proportions of a legend. In the Presidential campaign of 1960, all eyes were on the Wisconsin primary, which was the first test of the political effects of John F. Kennedy's Catholicism. The day before the primary, it is said, thousands of Catholic families all over Wisconsin received a mailing, postmarked Minneapolis (the home of Hubert Humphrey, Kennedy's opponent), urging them not to vote for an agent of the pope of Rome. Corbin always denied he had anything to do with this exercise in voter turnout, but few believed him. It was too much in character. As time passed, the story was woven into the fabric of Paul Corbin tales told by friends and enemies alike, with punch lines delivered in deep, gravelly imitations of Corbin's own voice.

This was a political operative who single-handedly gave the term a sinister ring. Long before Watergate made dirty tricks unacceptable, Corbin was bedeviling opponents with his wit, his strategies, his very presence. Were the stories true? Why should it matter to us? It never mattered to Corbin. He told them himself with a nudge, a wink, and a leer, leaving just enough unsaid. As his eulogist, *Nashville Tennessean* publisher John Siegenthaler, said at his funeral, "No matter how bad his enemies tried to make him seem, he always wanted his friends to think he was worse."

The obituaries respectfully noted that Corbin was an aide to Robert Kennedy, active in primaries, a special assistant to the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and so forth. In fact, for more than 30 years Corbin operated as the wild card of American politics, behind the scenes and at the margins. With his tailored suits, broad-brimmed fedoras, raspy voice, and unparalleled nerve, Corbin was the Billy Martin of politics, not because he was a brawler, but because, like the spiky Martin, where Corbin went, havoc was sure to follow. He was a supreme political organizer, but friends said you could never send Paul to the same district twice. He often operated under assumed names. In Robert Kennedy's 1968 California primary campaign, he managed the city of Salinas under the name of Colonel Schofield, the retired naval officer. Why? Probably because even he didn't know what he was about to do next.

Paul Corbin was politically androgynous. In his earliest days as a union organizer, he briefly was on the payroll of the Communist Harry Bridges in the Longshoremen's Union. Later he turned up as the buddy and business partner of America's leading Communist hunter, Senator Joe McCarthy. He began his career by supporting John F. Kennedy for President, and ended it by helping Ronald Reagan defeat Jimmy Carter. Robert Kennedy took him as a godson when he converted to Catholicism, and he was also a pal and political confidant of CIA Director William Casey.

Corbin first hooked up with the Kennedys in that 1960 Wisconsin Presidential primary. Stories abound of how he exploited the network of the Catholic Church on Kennedy's behalf, distributing tickets to campaign events through the Knights of Columbus, turning out the Alter Society, and telling seminarians to show up in sport shirts so as not to draw attention to themselves (and JFK's Catholicism). Even through high jinks like these, Corbin won the lasting affection and loyalty of Robert Kennedy.

After John F. Kennedy's election, Corbin was installed at the Democratic National Committee as Attorney General Robert Kennedy's eyes and ears. It was during this time that FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover began telling the press and members of Congress that Corbin had been a Communist, leading to his summons to visit the House Un-American Activities Committee. Corbin tied the committee in knots, producing a photograph of himself at a state convention of the American Legion in Wisconsin in the embrace of Senator Joe McCarthy. In those days when McCarthy traveled the state making anti-Communist, patriotic speeches, his confederate, Corbin, arrived a day or so in advance peddling American flags. Corbin claimed McCarthy insisted on a 60 to 40 percent split on proceeds from the sales. Even at that ratio it's doubtful that the orator achieved parity, since Corbin handled the money first.

After President Kennedy's death, Corbin disappeared from his desk at the Democratic National Committee for an excursion to New Hampshire, where he was discovered promoting a write-in drive to get Robert Kennedy named Vice President on the 1964 ticket. This aroused the paranoia of Lyndon Johnson, who believed

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RFK was behind the move. Corbin may be the only national committee staffer ever fired by direct order of a President. As Arthur Schlesinger Jr. tells it, Johnson told Bobby Kennedy, "If Corbin's such a good fellow, you pay him. He's been around town for three years knocking my head off and I've never met the bum."

After 1968, devastated by the death of Robert Kennedy, Corbin moved to Nashville for a short time, where he became curator of the Country Music Wax Museum and famous for his fine collection of cowboy boots. Corbin habitually borrowed the boots off the wax dummies, one day wearing Johnny Cash's, the next Hank Williams's.

Corbin returned to Washington, where he operated successfully for many years (even after being fired by LBJ), and the legends grew of a premier political fixer able to work both sides of the aisle. In his eulogy, which had the entire funeral congregation roaring with laughter, Siegenthaler told how his friend managed an encounter with George McGovern the day after McGovern's nomination in 1972: "You don't have to make me an acceptance speech, George," growled Corbin. "Just tap your tambourine and sing three verses of 'Blowing in the Wind.' "

In 1980 the ubiquitous Corbin wrangled a private meeting with Jim Baker, then campaign chairman for Presidential candidate George Bush. Baker had never encountered this gravelly voiced package of effrontery, and he listened wide-eyed as Corbin explained that Bush was looking agitated and jittery on the campaign trail. "Put a couple of pretty secretaries on the campaign plane to keep him relaxed in the off-hours," Corbin advised, adding, "That's what we did with JFK in 1960."

Nineteen-eighty was perhaps Corbin's most active Presidential year. Detesting the pious, ineffectual President Jimmy Carter, he served as a behind-the-scenes adviser in Edward Kennedy's effort to topple Carter. When that failed and Carter won renomination, Corbin told friends on the floor of the Democratic convention that he intended to work for Reagan. Soon he was providing intelligence on the Democrats directly to William Casey, Reagan's campaign manager, who recognized a kindred spirit. When Republican John Anderson decided to run as an Independent, Corbin worked that precinct too, helping to convince Anderson's managers that they needed a clearly identified Kennedy Democrat on their ticket as Vice President to give liberals a guilt-free reason to vote against Carter. The man chosen was Corbin's old pal, former Wisconsin Governor Pat Lucey.

Then, of course, there was President Carter's debate briefing book, which turned up in the hands of the Reagan campaign. When the "Debategate" scandal broke two years later, White House chief of staff Jim Baker claimed he'd been given the book by Bill Casey. But Casey, then CIA director, said he had no such recollection. Then came reports that Corbin had admitted to a reporter that he'd smuggled the book to Casey. The CIA director telephoned his friend Corbin. "Did I get that book from you?" he asked.

"No," Corbin replied, thereby protecting Casey's cover and leaving everyone else thoroughly confused. At his funeral mourners were evenly divided over whether Corbin was guilty.

Paul Corbin might have functioned better in the days of Plunkitt or Tweed or Pendergast. With him gone, the League of Women Voters has less to worry over. But in a profession with little enough to laugh about, Corbin lived to have some fun, and to his brand of politics, he left no heirs.

Wherever he is, you may be sure the erring boy is assembling his pals: "Bob Kennedy, meet Bill Casey."

KEN BODE, formerly politics editor of TNR, is director of the Center for Contemporary Media at DePauw University.

Homage to Vaclav Havel.

A LIFE LIKE A WORK OF ART

By Milan Kundera

I have always been especially allergic to the remark attributed (wrongly, I think) to Goethe: "a life should resemble a work of art." It is because life is formless and does not resemble a work of art that man needs art. Yet in these great days for my old homeland, Central Europe, I learned with enormous joy that Vaclav Havel would soon become president of the Czechoslovak Republic. I think about him and say to myself: there are cases (very rare) where comparing a life to a work of art is justified.

Havel's entire life is in fact built on a single great theme; there is nothing random about it, there are no shifts in direction (Havel was never touched by the lyrical illusions of communism and thus had no need to rid himself of them, as have many of his elders); this life is one gradual, continuous process, and it gives the impression of a perfect compositional unity. Moreover, it seems to me that Havel himself shapes his life with an artist's pleasure, as a sculptor does his stone, progressively giving it an ever greater clarity of meaning and form. The way he led the struggle of the past weeks ("a kind of peaceable revolution," he told me in a letter) was fascinating not only from the political standpoint but also from the aesthetic. It was like the *prestissimo* finale of a sonata by a very great master.

A work of art is meant to be perceived by others. Making one's life a work of art immediately exposes it to scrutiny, to the flood of light. It is unavoidable. But if the man thus illuminated is an artist as well, he takes a

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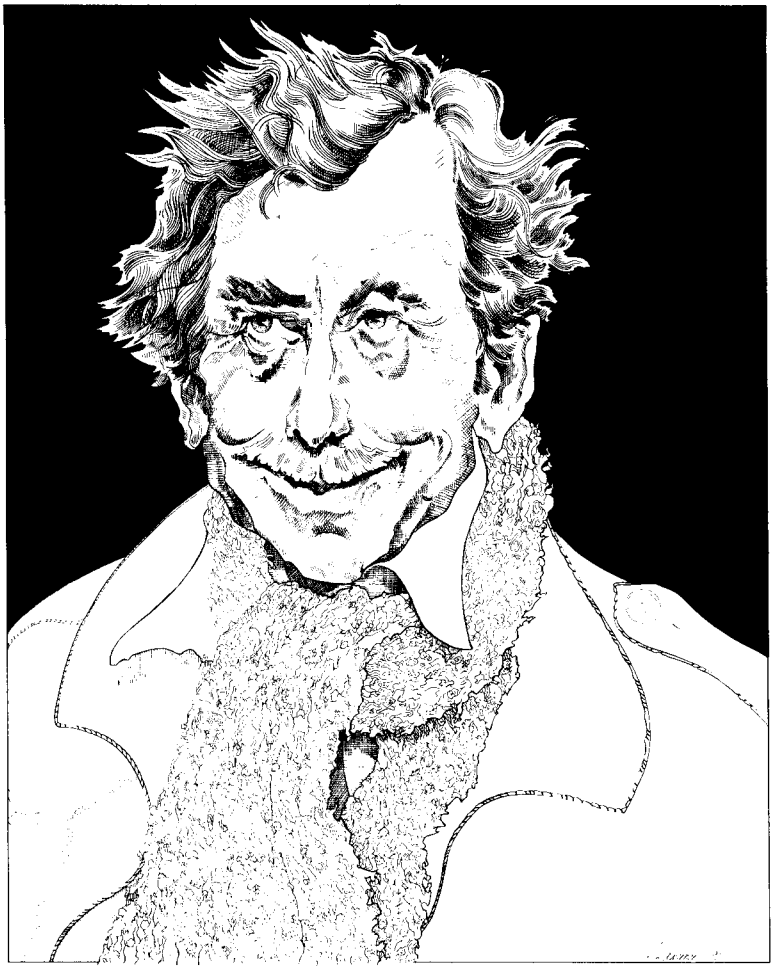
risk: his life become work of art can cause his works of art to be forgotten. In Havel's case, this would be a pity. He was under thirty when his first plays were performed in Prague: *The Garden Party* and *The Memorandum*. They were intelligent, provocative, unlike anything else (I once discussed this in the preface to a volume of his plays: they could be placed if need be, but only approximately, within the context of the theater of the absurd), and had an irresistible humor. In fact, if these two plays are my favorites among all his work, it is because I was still able to see them in Prague, in superb productions that were entirely faithful to the author's spirit. And because I was able to see them at the Theater on the Balustrade, where Havel was working at the time and which, for Czech intellectuals, will always remain the symbol of the sixties and of their impudently free spirit. The later works (for instance, the excellent one-act *Audience*) are no less fine; if there still existed in the world companies that consider an author's text to be the foundation of theater art, these plays would be in the repertory everywhere.



VACLAV HAVEL BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Even though Havel is known to the world primarily (and justly) as a founder of Charter 77, as a dissident who has spent years in prison, as the prime moral representative of his country, at heart he will always be a dramatist, a poet of the theater. To ignore this is to fail to understand him. It means failing to understand, first of all, how deeply he is rooted in the specificity of the national tradition: the nineteenth-century movement of Czech renewal was organized not around the Church, not around an army, not around a political party, but around culture in general and the theaters in particular. The greatest Czech political figures of the time were writers: Frantisek Palacky, a historian; Karel Havlicek (curiously, his name is the diminutive form of Havel), a satiric poet; and then Tomas Masaryk, a philosopher.

His dimension as an artist will make Havel different from today's other great political personages. We should not forget that his earliest plays put his audiences into a state of perpetual laughter. Yes, at the start of Havel's career, there was laughter. Humor. And humor means skepticism. And skepticism in turn means self-irony. Two years ago, in Paris, I saw his play *Largo Desolato*. In it, Havel ironically considers his own situation: that of a man who devotes himself to political struggle and thus is no longer master of a life—his own—that everyone else seeks to appropriate. When, in the last act, the police come to arrest the protagonist, he is almost happy with the opportunity finally to be alone, to belong to no one but himself. The dissident, this modern hero, bears his fate not as an exhilarating glory but rather as a burden that is almost absurd. He would prefer to do other things (write plays, for instance, or poetry), to be rid of his destiny, but he cannot. For meanwhile, something mightier than he has seized hold of him, something that goes beyond him, something that Havel calls *responsibility*.

To him this is the ethic of dissidence. Havel discusses it in an essay (on *A Czech Dreambook* by Ludvik Vaculik, a magnificent work that springs from the same "skeptical dissidence"). Underlying this ethic is the skeptical certainty (which only a dramatic author or a novelist can arrive at) that there is no unity between a man's character and his destiny, that the one is always victim of the other. (The work of art that a life becomes is not identical with that life; it may even be hostile to it.) This capacity to take an ironic view of one's own situation, to guard one's life against any melodramatic interpretation (kitsch interpretation, we would say in Central Europe), can be called a kind of wisdom. Among the great political figures of our time, I see no other who possesses that wisdom. For it is the wisdom of a poet.

—Translated from the French original by Linda Asher

MILAN KUNDERA has lived in Paris since 1975. His most recent novel is *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

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Notes from the underclass.

'BOMZH' AWAY

By Cathy Young

"Let's be honest: we are already observing without much astonishment or compassion the details of the brutal existence of vagrants. Haggard men withered in their prime, 'old ladies' not yet 40. . . . Their lives are centered around the liquor store, the bottle redemption spot, and a maintenance closet at some train station. . . .

" 'They won't let us live in peace, they're bad for the kids.' The chorus of voices coming from people tired of the proximity of this crowd usually concludes with an angry demand: 'Get them away!' Where to?"

This is not a guilt-ridden New Yorker speaking, but Vladimir Kozin, a deputy editor of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, writing last August. These days revelations about social ills such as homelessness, hunger, child labor, and street crime abound in the Soviet press, in stark contrast to how the Western media have always dealt with Soviet poverty. Back when the Soviets made headlines mainly by locking up subversive poets in the icy punishment cells of labor camps, tireless seekers of balance were careful to explain that the Soviet regime understood human rights in its own way, that Soviet rulers and subjects alike believed that their system guaranteed equally vital human rights: job security, free housing and medical care, and other "economic rights."

Major U.S. newspapers and newsmagazines made this point in nearly every story about U.S.-Soviet sparring on human rights issues. A typical article in *U.S. News and World Report* in October 1985 stated, "Fundamentally different perceptions of human rights lie at the heart of the argument. To the Kremlin, human rights are associated primarily with the conditions of physical survival. . . ." Guidebooks for high school social studies teachers, such as the National Council for Social Studies' 1982 "International Human Rights, Society, and the Schools," suggested that to regard "our" definition of human rights as superior to "theirs" would be inexcusably "ethnocentric." And slick Soviet spokesmen on American television, if pressed about the jailing of dissidents or the suppression of writers, invariably pronounced, "Well, we're not telling you to house your homeless or feed your hungry."

The theory of equal-but-different concepts of human rights bears an eerie resemblance to the ratiocinations of Southern pro-slavery apologists: the slaves might be totally subjugated by their masters, but unlike Northern workers, they were always assured shelter, a hot meal, and care in sickness and old age. Yet many Americans clung to the belief that, for all the repugnant features of the Soviet system, it was at least in some ways a more equitable one than ours, that even the least attractive socialism had some redeeming values. During the U.S.-Soviet December 1987 summit, *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis chided the Soviets for not understanding how deeply Americans treasure political freedom—and the United States for not understanding how shocked the Soviets in Mikhail Gorbachev's entourage might be by the extremes of wealth and poverty in America.

My childhood and adolescence in a more or less comfortably off Moscow family gave me very limited exposure to real Soviet poverty. Still, I knew enough of the shortages and lines, of the cramped apartments shared by unrelated families with communal kitchens and toilets, and of the hospital wards that looked like barracks, to wince at the notion of some supposed advantages enjoyed by the masses in the U.S.S.R.

As it turns out, I didn't know the half of it. Ten years ago in Moscow, if I had heard a story about Soviet railroad workers housed for more than 15 years in discarded trains with no proper heating or lighting, without running water or indoor toilets, I might have thought they were exaggerations. But now such stories are commonplace. *Izvestia* published this particular case last August with photographs.

Now on display are also the true Soviet homeless—known as *bomzhi*, the plural of *bomzh*, an awkward acronym for "without fixed place of residence." Many are substance abusers, not unlike their Western counterparts. Yet the vast majority, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*'s Kozin stresses, did not choose to become vagrants. Often they are stripped of their residence permits after serving a felony sentence, undergoing compulsory treatment at an alcoholism rehab center, or violating the law against letting an unregistered person stay in one's apartment. Others find themselves out on the streets when their decrepit homes are razed and they are not provided with new housing.

How many are they? According to *Argumenty i Fakty*, in 1988 the number of people detained for vagrancy in the Soviet Union (population 280 million) was 110,582, down from 172,709 in 1984. The drop, one suspects, is due less to a decline in vagrancy than to a decline in vagrancy arrests. This can be interpreted (charitably) as evidence of liberalization, or (more plausibly) of such general chaos that cops don't bother to pick up derelicts anymore, though surely even in 1984 many vagrants were not detained. Some independent Soviet journalists put the number of transients and homeless people at 700,000; *Moscow News* claims there are three million.

Statistics on homelessness in the United States (population 249 million), with estimates ranging from 450,000 to the homeless advocates' three million, include people living in shelters and welfare hotels. The Soviet *bomzh* does not have the option of seeking out even these meager dwellings, though with bourgeois values like charity making a comeback in the land of the proletariat, there are plans to open "flophouses" and soup kitchens in

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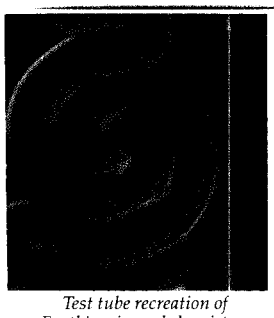
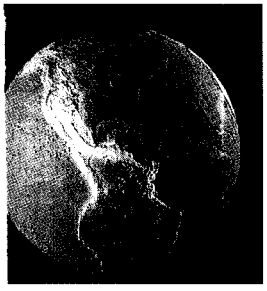


Test tube recreation of Earth's primeval chemistry.

Arizona's Meteor Crater: one of Earth's many asteroid impact sites.



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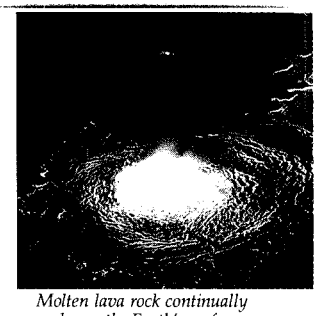
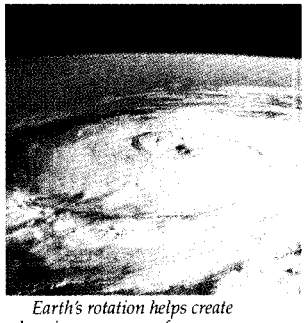


Molten lava rock continually reshapes the Earth's surface.



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some major cities, including Leningrad.

In fact, some permanent housing in the Soviet Union may not be that far removed from U.S.-style welfare hotels and homeless shelters. The railroad workers are an extreme example, but there are tens of millions housed in "communal flats" and dormitories. True, these people have a place to live, and there is no stigma attached, but the physical conditions are at least as bad as those in shelters in the United States: in addition to overcrowding, the buildings often lack basic amenities such as running water.

A September 13 article in *Izvestia* chronicles the odyssey of the now homeless Vera Melnik and her family. For years the four adults and three children occupied a room of 144 square feet, with a single tiny window, in a dilapidated house. In 1987 they were offered temporary quarters in a two-room apartment and were about to get permission to live there permanently when the City Executive Committee decided it wanted the apartment for one of its employees. The Melniks were thrown out on the street on a freezing January day.

In a September 1988 *Literaturnaya Gazeta* article, a correspondent described the case of a disabled woman living with a 15-year-old son and a younger daughter in a room of 54 square feet, on a pension of 60 rubles a month. The minimum subsistence level as defined by the government is 75 rubles a month per person (about $12 at the new exchange rate for tourists). Many Soviet economists and sociologists consider that far too low in a time of rising inflation. An article on poverty in the July issue of the magazine *Rabotnitsa* ("Working Woman") estimates that families with per capita incomes of up to 90 rubles a month should be counted as poor. Current figures in major Soviet news publications show at least 43 million to 48 million people—up to 17 percent of the population—living below the official poverty line.

The largest category may be the elderly. The median monthly retirement pension today is 84 rubles. Of the country's approximately 47 million retirees, 16 million get 60 rubles a month or less. In *Nedelya* ("Week"), a reporter writes about those old folks, mostly women, who do not get any benefits at all because they have not been in the work force for the requisite 25 years. Widows can receive their husbands' pensions, but some do not because of bureaucratic snafus or loopholes in the laws. They are entitled to 30 rubles a month in government aid if they have no immediate family.

As one reads on in the Soviet press of the late 1980s, one has a vision of the country as a vast closet filled with skeletons, now on display. These rattling bones include various forms of institutionalized child abuse: schoolchildren, especially in Central Asia, regularly coerced into "volunteer" harvesting work in conditions reminiscent of the worst migrant labor abuses in the United States; prostitutes as young as 11 years old, often forced into the trade by parents or older teenagers acting as pimps; one million kids, orphaned or abandoned by their parents, living in group homes, where they are often ill-fed and mistreated.

Health officials now decry a backward medical system that serves, at best, only 60 percent of the population's health needs—and, though nominally free, is permeated with bribery. Accounts in the press describe maternity hospitals that lack minimal sanitary conditions, where women lie in filth and give birth on stone floors, where newborn babies are left overnight in dark, rat-infested rooms.

There is an old Soviet joke that asks what the Russian Revolution achieved. "Before the Revolution," goes the punch line, "there were the rich and the poor; now there are only the poor." In fact, economist A. Zaichenko in *Argumenty i Fakty* argues that disparities of wealth and poverty are actually greater in the Soviet Union than in the United States—if you count only personal wealth and consumption, not the corporate holdings of rich Americans. Using such criteria as amount of living space, car ownership, and other amenities, he gives the following income distribution scales for the two countries: three percent of all U.S. households are rich, 17 percent are affluent, 60 percent middle class, and 20 percent poor. In the Soviet Union, 2.3 percent of all households are rich (many by illegal means), 11.2 percent have a lifestyle that can be considered middle class by Western standards, and 86.5 percent of the population is poor. (In a subsequent issue, historian A. Popov claims that only 61.6 percent of Soviets are poor, and 31.3 percent middle class.)

Furthermore, Zaichenko points out, income disparities often mean different things in the West and in the U.S.S.R.; for example, poverty in the Soviet Union is much more likely to result in malnutrition. Per capita meat consumption in the poorest ten percent of American families is only ten percent below the level of the richest ten percent (though, of course, the quality of the food is different). According to 1986 data, a Soviet family of four with a monthly income of 900 rubles consumes almost three times as much meat as a family of four living on 260 rubles a month.

Whether the benefits of *perestroika* will trickle down to a vast number of Soviet poor remains to be seen. Meanwhile, among the unquestionable advantages of *glasnost* we can count the inglorious demise of the myth of "economic rights" under Communist regimes. For some time Soviet spokesmen continued to fall back on this myth—even as Soviet newspapers were demolishing it—in response to Western criticism of Soviet human rights violations. Gorbachev himself trotted out America's homeless when subjected to a mild grilling by Tom Brokaw on NBC some two years ago. But over the past year and a half, this leitmotiv has faded away. Soviet commentators more and more openly acknowledge that social guarantees work far better in "the capitalist world, so severely criticized in the recent past," as Kozin puts it, than they do in the Soviet Union.

But some people never give up. The writer of a letter published in the *New York Times* on January 7, upset about "the self-righteous, sanctimonious celebrations of the 'victory' of capitalism over communism," declares that though Communist governments are bad,

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"they constructed massive social service delivery systems that eliminated illiteracy, petty street crime, prostitution, and a myriad of other social cancers. . . . Though disadvantaged in consumer gadgets, their populations are well-educated and healthy." The writer is a professor of sociology in Illinois.

CATHY YOUNG, a free-lance writer, is the author of *Growing Up in Moscow* (Ticknor & Fields).

ON THE HILL

SAVAGE GUS

By Weston Kosova

In 1988 Representative Gus Savage was invited to speak to a group of Illinois business executives. He immediately made it clear to his audience he was miffed that he hadn't been asked sooner. According to a Congressional aide, Savage warned that he is very powerful and wouldn't be ignored. He launched into an angry history of black power politics in Chicago and harshly condemned his political opponents as "Uncle Toms." When one of the businessmen attempted a question, Savage cut him up with insults. The rest of the audience sat stunned. At last Savage collected himself and said calmly: "I haven't jeopardized any campaign contributions, I hope."

Gus Savage is one of the wonders of the Congressional incumbency machine. On Capitol Hill the five-term Representative is widely considered a buffoon, but there's nothing lighthearted about him. He chastises colleagues and questions their motives. He denounces reporters with obscenities and then accuses the press of conspiring to get him. Anyone who disagrees with him—black or white—he labels a racist. He's Louis Farrakhan's leading supporter on the Hill (Farrakhan calls him "our fighter in Congress"), frequently shows up at rallies with Farrakhan, writes articles for his newspaper, *The Final Call*, and appears to share his anti-Semitic attitudes.

Savage has narrowly won multicandidate Democratic primary races five times. He's beaten Republican opponents by huge margins, though that's not saying much in Chicago, where the GOP is practically non-existent. But soon Savage's fortunes may be changing. He is the target of probes by the House Ethics Committee and the Justice Department, and if they don't get him, one of his 1990 Democratic challengers, civil rights activist Mel Reynolds, might.

Savage briefly became a household word last July, when a Peace Corps volunteer accused him of sexually assaulting her. The woman told the *Washington Post* that during a Congressional visit to Zaire last March, the 63-year-old Savage grabbed her as they rode in his limousine, kissed her, and "tried to force me to have sex with him." When she refused, she said Savage told her she was a "traitor to the black movement." Savage laughed off the incident ("I know how to love"), but fellow Democrats didn't. At the request of Pat Schroeder, Barney Frank, and Matt McHugh, the Ethics Committee is investigating what happened. Meanwhile, the Justice Department is also investigating Savage, along with D.C. Delegate Walter Fauntroy, on charges that Savage's son was on Fauntroy's payroll while living in Chicago.

Savage told a reporter on Capitol Hill who questioned him about the Zaire incident to "get the fuck out of my face." He called Chicago TV reporter Mike Flannery a "faggot" in response to a similar question. Last January Savage had blown up at Flannery and other reporters when asked about the pending Justice Department investigation. "Let me ask you a question," Savage retorted. "Are you still wearing your wife's underwear?" "Are you still messing with little boys?" he asked another reporter. And to a third: "You know, we're all pretty upset with what you're doing with your wife's sister."

Savage insists that because he's black, the press deliberately ignores his accomplishments, trumpets his exploits, and fails to report his side of the story. "Next to the church," Savage is fond of saying, "the media is the most racist institution in the country." But Savage makes it difficult to cover him. He usually refuses interviews to white reporters (neither he nor his staff would return my calls) and turns away black reporters who write for publications critical of him. "Most journalists are racists," he told one interviewer. "They're particularly resentful of a black who doesn't respect them."

A self-proclaimed spokesman for blacks the world over ("I don't represent a district," he told *Chicago* magazine reporter David Jackson, "I represent an international movement"), Savage is quick to lash out at fellow black politicians who do not follow his lead. In 1981, shortly after Savage arrived in Washington, his son was arrested for driving an unregistered car without his driver's license. Savage was so incensed that the police would pick up the son of a black representative that he denounced D.C. Mayor Marion Barry as a racist and threatened to vote against home rule for the District to spite him.

At a memorial rally for Chicago Mayor Harold Washington in 1987, Savage intended to launch a "new Harold Washington movement," with himself at the helm. The event's organizers disagreed. Savage went berserk and was dragged, kicking and screaming, from the pavilion. Later Savage branded black City Council members who voted Eugene Sawyer in as interim Mayor "Uncle Toms," because Savage was backing a different candidate, Tim Evans. When Democratic Party chairman Ron Brown campaigned in Chicago for Dem-

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ocratic Mayoral nominee Richard M. Daley, Savage denounced Brown too, for not backing independent Evans.

Later that year, at a Farrakhan gathering in Chicago, Savage defended Farrakhan at a time when Jesse Jackson was under pressure to distance himself from him. "I will choose between white and right," Savage said, adopting Farrakhan's speaking style, "but I am not going to choose between Jesse and Farrakhan. The more whites hate a black, the more I love him. The more they fear him, the more I want to befriend him." In denouncing Farrakhan's critics, Savage singled out "the Zionists who may think they were chosen by God," a standard Farrakhan Jew bash. (A year later Savage made arrangements for Steve Cokely, an aide to Eugene Sawyer who was fired after accusing Jewish doctors of injecting black babies with AIDS, to be his guest at the Democratic National Convention.)

Savage's antics have alienated many colleagues in the House and have cost him the support of former political backers, as well as of black columnists such as William Raspberry of the *Washington Post*, Vernon Jarrett of the *Chicago Tribune*, and Nate Clay of the *Chicago Metro News*, who resent Savage's cavalier charges of racism. "Savage has taken the real, sincere pain of racism and turned it into something political," says Mel Reynolds, who once worked with Savage and is now running against him. Savage's longtime friend and political consultant Don Rose says, "Part of it is real feelings, part of it is expanded into shtick."

Savage started out in Chicago opposition politics, supporting Henry Wallace over Truman in 1948, and went on to manage campaigns of black candidates running against Richard J. Daley's Democratic machine. Throughout the '50s and '60s Savage established a name as a political agitator. He staged civil rights demonstrations protesting city housing policy and led boycotts of businesses that didn't hire blacks.

In 1977 Savage convinced his old college friend Harold Washington to run for Mayor, and then managed his campaign. Washington lost then, but won in 1983. Savage's supporters say that he was instrumental in clearing the way for Washington's Mayoral bid. Savage's own break came with the retirement of Representative Morgan Murphy, an old-style machine Democrat. Savage won the seat in 1980, in a then majority-black district, on an anti-machine, pro-black platform.

But Savage has since abandoned any genuine impulses he might have had toward constructive change. As a Representative, he prefers talk to action. Savage's portfolio bulges with trivial legislation, such as his six bills in honor of the boxer Joe Louis, and a law renaming the Social Security building in Chicago after Harold Washington. After five terms Savage has only two major legislative accomplishments to his credit, neither of which truly benefits his constituents. One is his work to increase minority set-asides in federal construction and defense contracts. These ostensibly help blacks get jobs, but in fact they often merely encourage white-owned firms to hire black front men to win set-aside contracts for them (see "The Set-Aside Scam" by Michael Oreskes, TNR, December 24, 1984). His other achievement, a multimillion-dollar federal office building he helped get for Chicago, is a huge piece of pork from which Savage secured over $40 million more in set-asides.

On at least one occasion Savage actually went out of his way to avoid pushing legislation that would have benefited his constituents. Jim Finch, president of the Southeast Chicago Development Commission, approached Savage's staff with a proposal to convert a closed-down steel plant in Savage's district into a recycling center. Getting that done should have been easy. Savage is chairman of the obscure House Subcommittee on Economic Development, whose support Finch needed. Savage could have won points as an environmentalist and created 1,000 badly needed jobs almost without effort. But he turned Finch down, saying he didn't want any garbage brought into his district. "What surprised me most was we were talking for a long time with his staff and got a lot of support from them," Finch says. "Then Savage came from left field and made it clear he did not want it."

Savage wins re-election by squeaking by in the Democratic primary and trampling on his Republican opponent in the general election. He won the 1980 primary with 45 percent of the vote, got 39 percent in 1982, 45 percent in 1984, 51 percent in 1986, and 52 percent in 1988. Reynolds got only 14 percent in that race, while one other candidate got 25 percent and others split nine percent.

Reynolds, a Rhodes scholar, and a former University of Illinois administrator and close aide to Jesse Jackson, is bracing for a nasty rematch. "Gus Savage doesn't just want to beat you, he wants to destroy you, so he doesn't have to deal with you again," he says. Reynolds should know. During the 1988 race Savage told a reporter in Chicago that Reynolds had been arrested on a "sex charge" while working for Jackson's 1984 campaign in New Hampshire, and that Jackson had fired him as a result. The story was fiction. "The only way he can win is by muddying me up," says Reynolds.

Reynolds is quickly gathering the support of Democratic Party committeemen in Chicago—including some former Savage backers. (Jackson is wisely staying neutral.) An early poll has Reynolds beating Savage 40 percent to 35 percent, even though only 45 percent of the voters know who Reynolds is. Among voters who know both Savage and Reynolds, the spread is even greater. But another Democrat, Illinois state Senator Howard Brookins, recently entered the race. If past elections are any indicator, Brookins is more likely to steal votes from Reynolds than Savage; Reynolds needs to win Savage's borderline votes to prevent him from again squeezing by with a narrow margin.

If neither Reynolds nor Brookins gets rid of Savage, though, the ethics investigation may. Or the Justice Department investigation. Or his own mouth. •

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If you have to ask, you can't afford it.

THE ZILLIONAIRES CLUB

By Fred Barnes

For Herb Kohl, the $6.1 million of his own money that he spent on his race for the Senate from Wisconsin in 1988 was a drop in the bucket. His adjusted gross income for that year, boosted by the sale of a 20 percent share in two shopping malls, was $49 million. Kohl's personal wealth, including ownership of the Milwaukee Bucks professional basketball team, is estimated at $100 million. (Kohl isn't saying.)

Kohl was exempt from the normal prerequisites for national office. He didn't have to climb the local political ladder or devote months, maybe years, to campaign fund-raising. Kohl announced late (three months before the September primary), scared Representative Jim Moody into withdrawing, hired top-flight consultants, spent furiously on TV ads, defeated two strong liberal opponents for the Democratic nomination, continued spending his own money, and edged out moderate Republican Susan Engeleiter in the general election.

In Washington the new Senator was spared the stress of quickly establishing a new residence. Kohl, who is unmarried, moved into a $250-a-day suite at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, two blocks from Capitol Hill. Only now, a year after arriving in Washington, is he leaving the Hyatt and buying a house. Meanwhile, Kohl is taking no chances on re-election in 1994. He's kept the two Wisconsin consultants who masterminded his victory in 1988 on his personal payroll. He probably doesn't need them. To mount a serious challenge to Kohl, a candidate faces several tedious years of fund-raising. Even then, Kohl is equipped to outspend all comers. So who'd want to challenge him? Practically no one.

It's no accident that the Senate is a citadel of multimillionaires like Kohl. More than ever, the rich have an enormous advantage in getting elected. And as Senate campaigns become more expensive, that advantage is growing. Federal law limits individual contributions to $1,000, except if you're giving to your own campaign. Then the sky's the limit. Successful Senate races cost an average of $4 million in 1988. By the mid-1990s, the cost will rise to $6 million-$10 million, depending on how high the price of TV and radio time for campaign commercials soars. The job of raising money will be all the more onerous and mind-numbing—unless you're a fat cat who hankers after a Senate seat.

The influx of zillionaires has created, among other things, class division in the Senate. The lifestyle of wealthy Senators isn't limited by the salary of $89,500. The lifestyle of non-rich Senators is. Republican John Warner of Virginia uses an apartment at the expensive Watergate complex during the week. On weekends he retreats to his 777-acre estate, Atoka, in Middleburg, Virginia, an hour from Washington. Warner, by the way, got rich in a divorce settlement with one of his former wives, heiress Catherine Mellon, in 1973.

Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia also kept his country place when he won a Senate seat in 1984. In Washington he bought a $6.5 million estate near Rock Creek Park and renovated it extensively. Rockefeller won't let the press visit the place, even when Democratic receptions or fund-raisers are held there. But a Knight-Ridder reporter talked to contractors and discovered there are 11 bathrooms on one floor alone. After the remodeling, Rockefeller refinanced the house with a mortgage of $15.3 million. Assuming a normal rate of interest, this means his monthly payment is about $135,000, the maximum a Senator can receive in salary and honoraria in an entire year.

Democrat John Glenn of Ohio owns an airplane, a turbo-charged, twin-engine Beech Baron. He keeps it at Dulles International Airport and uses it mostly to fly to Ohio. Glenn, a former astronaut, pilots it himself. How can a former Marine afford this? He's made millions from part ownership of two Holiday Inns. After his unsuccessful Senate bid in 1964, Glenn used his own money to pay off campaign debts. He was left with a $4 million debt from his 1984 Presidential campaign, but he's barred by federal law from paying that off with personal funds.

Democrat Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey lives at the Watergate. (So does Senate Republican leader Bob Dole of Kansas.) Lautenberg keeps a home in Secaucus, New Jersey, which overlooks Manhattan, and another in Aspen, Colorado, where he goes to ski. Lautenberg always goes first class when flying. He became a multimillionaire by applying computer technology to processing paychecks. He won't reveal his wealth, but he hasn't disputed reports that he's worth $35 million to $55 million.

The Senate underclass isn't disadvantaged, it's just not rich. Poorer Senators tend to live in the Washington suburbs or in small apartments near the Capitol. Their

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spouses often work. Republican James McClure of Idaho moved into a modest brick rambler in Arlington, Virginia, when he was elected to the House in 1966 (he advanced to the Senate in 1972). He still lives there. McClure needed a place where he could send his kids to public schools. McClure owns a cabin in Idaho. His affluent Republican colleague John Heinz III of Pennsylvania is building a vacation home near Sun Valley worth many times McClure's spread. On January 5 McClure announced he won't run for re-election in 1990.

Republican Warren Rudman of New Hampshire didn't bring his family when he came in 1980. He lives in a two-bedroom apartment while his wife stays in the family home in New Hampshire. Rudman says he couldn't afford a comparable home in Washington. And his net worth of about $300,000 has shrunk since he's been a Senator. He's forced to use $10,000 to $15,000 of savings every year for living expenses. "I don't envy anybody, but I look at the lifestyle of some of my [richer] colleagues, particularly the lifestyle for their families, and . . ." Rudman didn't finish the thought.

About one-third of current Senators are millionaires, according to financial disclosure statements filed in 1989. But there are more millionaires than the forms reveal. Many, such as former Senator George McGovern, have made out like bandits in Washington real estate. The disclosure forms, designed to reveal as little as possible, hide this. Senators aren't required to list either their primary residence or trusts, and they can peg the value of their assets, income, and liabilities within a range. The top range is $250,000-plus.

This leads to preposterous lowballing of the real wealth of many Senators. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts listed only a minimum of $607,686 in income and $275 in honoraria. In 1979 he was reported to be worth at least $20 million, but most of that money is in blind trusts. His house in McLean, Virginia, is worth an easy $2 million. He stands to get a huge inheritance. And so on. Heinz, the heir to the H. J. Heinz food fortune, listed income of less than $500,000 and assets of at least $11.2 million to $13.6 million. That was last May. In September *Forbes* included Heinz among the 400 richest people in the country. His assets in Heinz stock alone were valued at $460 million. Rockefeller listed income of $389,500 and assets of $1.4 million or more. His house in Washington is worth many times that.

Were full disclosure mandated, the "preponderance" of Senators would be unmasked as millionaires, says Rudman. His guess is that "more than one-half, maybe two-thirds" qualify. That's also what Dole, a millionaire himself, guesses. It's true that the Senate has always been a haven for the rich, but not to this extent. Now it has become the elective office of choice for the well-heeled. Small wonder. The term is six years, you can stay for life if all goes well, and there are no heavy administrative duties. All you have to do is show up, yap, and vote. And money is crucial to getting there.

When millionaires buy their way into the Senate, their opponents feel cheated. "Even the thousands of people I met and talked with were more impressed by the 30-second spots [of Kohl] that bombarded them hour after hour, day after day, than by a quiet handshake with a live candidate," Ed Garvey, one of Kohl's vanquished primary foes, wrote in the *Nation*. "And, predictably, as Kohl rose in the polls, our money dried up."

In Congress zillionaires reinforce House members' populist scorn for Senators. Few House members, after all, spent their own money to get elected. When the Senate votes down a pay raise for Representatives (and Senators), as it did in January 1989, the House resents it. So do less wealthy Senators. In the Senate the Congressional pay raise is the one issue that causes class consciousness to bubble to the surface.

Last November, after the House passed a pay hike of almost 40 percent and eliminated honoraria, class warfare broke out. Dole, who remembers when he wasn't well-to-do, complained that "there are so many millionaires in the Senate it probably will not pass. . . . Why should a multimillionaire vote for a pay raise when he doesn't need it in the first place, and then [will] have to explain it at home in the second place? So this is another little barrier we have to climb in the Senate." The Senate didn't climb it. The big raise was voted down in favor of a ten percent "cost of living" hike.

Democrat Tim Wirth of Colorado protested that to defeat the bigger raise is to assure that "the Senate will become more and more an institution of wealthy individuals who . . . come here, not with a whole career of prior public service, but because they can independently afford to do so." Democrat Robert Byrd of West Virginia also warned against a Senate made up of "the independently wealthy." Byrd, a butcher by trade, said, "This should not be an institution to which a future welder in the shipyard cannot aspire in America, or a butcher, or a produce salesman, a store clerk, a garbage collector." Still another advocate of the raise, Republican David Durenberger of Minnesota, noted that "there are just more millionaires than us average folks than ever before" seeking Senate seats.

Many Senators were infuriated by the millionaires' vocal opposition to the raise. Republican Bill Armstrong of Colorado, who owns two TV stations and other properties, voted no but didn't speak against the raise out of deference to Senators "not fortunate enough to have outside income." Kohl was less restrained. "When I was elected a year ago," he declared on the Senate floor, "I signed a contract with the people of Wisconsin to serve as their Senator for $89,500 a year. I don't intend to try to renegotiate that contract." Lautenberg said the raise was "unwarranted and excessive."

Even worse is the effort to cut off honoraria entirely without raising Congressional salaries. Many Senators regard the $35,000 they're permitted to keep in honoraria as, in effect, part of their regular pay. They claim they need the money to maintain two homes, send kids to college, etc. Rudman says he expects the Senate to outlaw honoraria this year, and some Senators are "rather bitter" about this. Several told him they'll be forced to leave the Senate if this happens. We'll see.

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The pay scale, however, isn't the most significant issue prompted by the Senate's becoming a nest of millionaires. Ideology isn't either. Millionaires have made the Senate more plutocratic but not more conservative. On the contrary, the roster of rich Senators includes leading liberals: Kennedy, Howard Metzenbaum of Ohio, Rockefeller, Lautenberg, Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island, Bill Bradley of New Jersey, Bob Kerrey of Nebraska. And the Senate is not more disposed to pass legislation protecting wealth. Many millionaire liberals—Metzenbaum, for example—oppose a cut in the capital gains rate on the ground that it's a windfall for the rich.

In Kohl's 1988 campaign he sought to make a political virtue out of spending his own money. By refusing contributions from political action committees and self-financing his race, Kohl said he'd ensure his independence in Washington. He told voters he'd be "nobody's Senator but yours." Maybe he will. But electing millionaires doesn't immunize the Senate against special interests. Four of the five Senators who aided savings and loan kingpin Charles Keating are millionaires. Democrat Dennis DeConcini of Arizona, who led the charge for Keating against Federal Home Loan Bank Board regulators, is a millionaire many times over. It wasn't constituent service the Senators gave Keating. It was contributor service. He was a major campaign giver to all five Senators.

The appearance of rich candidates willing to spend millions may actually drive incumbent Senators into the arms of PACs and big donors like Keating. Incumbents facing re-election are terrified that a zillionaire might challenge them. This produces a fund-raising frenzy years before election day. To build a war chest, they turn to PACs and other special interests.

I have two problems with the rise of Senate zillionaires. One is the perversion of the electoral process. "A multimillionaire has two advantages," says Michael Waldman of Congress Watch, the Naderite group. "They can spend their money and they can gain instant credibility. The hardest thing for a candidate is to jump over the hurdle of not being taken seriously. That hurdle is primarily how much money they raise. . . . The moment Kohl announced, he was a serious candidate."

A wealthy candidate can also afford to take time off for a campaign. A multimillionaire doesn't worry about where his next paycheck's coming from. What's more, the money he gives to his own campaign is worth more than money raised from individual donors. That's because there are no fund-raising expenses in obtaining it.

The bankroll of rich candidates frequently frightens off opponents. They've got what is known as "shutout money," the kind that discourages challengers. In 1988 Lautenberg didn't spend any of his own money on his re-election. (He'd spent $5 million of his own in winning in 1982.) But Lautenberg's ability to tap personal resources kept Republican Representative Jim Courter from running against him. Courter knew he couldn't come close to matching Lautenberg in spending. So he ran this year for Governor of New Jersey, a race financed by public funds. Courter lost, but not because he was outspent.

Lautenberg represents the emerging pattern in the Senate career of millionaires. They finance their first races, then rely on incumbency to get re-elected. This worked for Heinz, who spent $2.5 million of his own in 1976 but none in his two re-election campaigns. Warner "loaned" $400,000 to his campaign in 1978, but didn't have to spend any personal money as an incumbent in 1984. Rockefeller spent $9 million of his own in 1984, but hopes to rely on contributions this year. Kohl says he'd like to do the same in 1994.

The surprising thing about self-financed Senate campaigns is that voters don't mind. "People didn't care if I spent my money," says Kohl. "It just wasn't an issue." Voters get more upset over PAC money than personal money. Ray Shamie exploited this in the Senate GOP primary in Massachusetts in 1984 to defeat Elliot Richardson. Shamie spent $1 million of his own, while attacking Richardson for accepting $200,000 in PAC money. "The negative publicity was all on Richardson," says Todd Domke, Shamie's chief strategist. In the general election against Democrat John Kerry, Shamie declined to spend his own money. He lost.

The other problem with Senate millionaires is that they're out of touch with the anxieties of average Americans. They can consult public opinion polls, but how much will a poll shape the sensibility and understanding of, say, Pell? Both Pell and his wife inherited fortunes (hers was A&P money). He entered political lore in 1960 when he dispatched an aide for a pair of galoshes as he campaigned in the rain. Later he asked the aide where he'd gotten them. "At Thom McAn's," the aide responded. "Well, give them back to Tom and thank him very much," Pell said. More recently, Rhode Island pols tell the story of Pell's encounter with a gas pump. This was the 1970s and the price per gallon had just shot above 90 cents. Pell looked at the number in the 90s and said, "I'm overdressed. I didn't know it was going to be this warm."

Kohl is hardly that remote. He's a nice man, not at all frivolous, moderate-to-liberal in political philosophy, with a sense of civic responsibility. He did Wisconsin a service by buying the Bucks in 1985 and keeping them in Milwaukee. But he's no William Proxmire, whom he replaced in the Senate. Proxmire prided himself on meeting voters. He said he shook hands with 150,000 to 200,000 people a year. In 1976 his entire re-election expense was $177. In 1982 it was $145.10. Proxmire met voters in person, Kohl met them on TV.

As luck would have it, Kohl's Republican opponent, Susan Engeleiter, came to Washington the same time he did. President Bush picked her to head the Small Business Administration. Engeleiter is married with two kids (aged two and five). Her husband stayed behind in Wisconsin—he works for an insurance firm—and she lives in a small townhouse outside Washington. (They get together on weekends.) Kohl may turn out to be an able Senator. But match Engeleiter's understanding of the strains of modern family life? That he'll never do. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

The Battle after the War

In 1950 Marlon Brando made his film debut, in *The Men*, as a paraplegic war veteran. It was both a daring and a shrewd choice of roles, heterodox and newsworthy just for that reason. Now Tom Cruise plays a paraplegic war veteran in **Born on the Fourth of July** (Universal), a choice both more daring and more shrewd than Brando's was. Cruise is much more of a star today than Brando was in 1950, so he had more to risk; on the other hand, Cruise and his advisers know that audience expectations about star behavior today are different from what they were 40 years ago. Hoffman and Newman and Pacino have played numerous roles that wandered far from cosmeticized stardom—with success; Cruise's choice reflects that fact.

All this may sound cynical, but it would be naive to believe that radical role choices by actors worth box-office millions are made without a scrap of box-office regard. For Cruise, the move has proved wise: the publicity, let alone the reviews, has done much to consolidate his position at the top. And for all of us, this is good news. It confirms the Hoffman-Newman-Pacino point. Film audiences now permit closer consonance between the screen lives of stars and the full range of contemporary experience.

Born on the Fourth of July is based on the autobiography of Ron Kovic, the Marine whose wounds in Vietnam paralyzed him from the waist down and who became an anti-war activist. The screenplay was written by the director, Oliver Stone, with Kovic. After a prelude on the Fourth of July that was his tenth birthday, the film takes us from Kovic's high school graduation in 1967 through enlistment in the Marines to combat, then to a veterans' hospital in the Bronx, and then to successive stages in Kovic's political development that end with his address to the Democratic National Convention in 1976.

Throughout this chronicle, there are varied tests of Cruise's ability, and throughout he makes the grade. Much has been said—justly—about his fire as the veteran locked into a wheelchair. But to me it's equally admirable that he's convincing at the start in the high school days—eager, square, brimming with poster slogans. Whatever his limitations, Cruise has one essential component of good acting: the power of intense concentration. This crumples any wisp of disbelief in us at either end of the story's spectrum and at all the stops in between.

What distracts us from time to time in his performance is not a lack of character understanding or emotional commitment but a technical flaw. His voice is thin and high-pitched. It doesn't help him as fully as it ought to. It sounds even higher when we hear him but don't see him—in voice-overs. This is a sideways tribute to his persona: when he's on screen, which he is a very great deal of the time, his presence compensates somewhat for his voice. Still, even though such a suggestion may seem superfluous for a smash-success star, I hope that he'll develop his voice. Cruise seems set for the long run, and that run may be even longer—and wider—if his voice can grow to serve him as, say, Newman's has done.

Much of what Cruise accomplishes here, his open-throttle fullness without actorish display, must in some measure be due to Stone's direction. Stone's talent for helping actors, shown in his past films, is underscored here by the performances of the whole cast—among them, Caroline Kava, loving and frightened as Kovic's mother; Raymond J. Barry, loving and humble as his father; Kyra Sedgwick, tender as his high school sweetheart; Frank Whaley, grimly comprehending as another vet; Willem Dafoe, spitting venom as another paraplegic vet whom Kovic meets at a Mexican resort that specializes in supplying drinks and women to disabled veterans. All of them ring gratifyingly true.

A Vietnam veteran himself, Stone wrote and directed *Platoon*, as persuasive a picture of the day-to-day life of men in a combat zone as I know. In *Fourth of July* there's a long combat scene that ends with the wounding of Kovic. That sequence is a phantasmagoria of battle—in which women and children are killed, in which Kovic kills a man in his own squad—that is at least as horrifying in its madness as in its bloodshed. As Kovic puts it later, it was "confusing." Stone, surely and knowingly, unleashes the wildness that

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Enemies, A Love Story. *A man and three women, all survivors of Nazi horrors, amorously entangled in New York, 1949. I. B. Singer's daringly comic novel excellently transposed by Paul Mazursky and a superb cast. (Reviewed 1/1/90)* **Glory.** *Edward Zwick's second film is a full-bodied, thrilling account of a black regiment in the Union Army. Matthew Broderick is insufficient as their colonel, but all the others—and the firm texture of the piece—are splendid. (1/8&15/90)* **Henry V.** *Much more cinematic than Olivier's version. Kenneth Branagh, who adapted, directed, and plays Henry, is not in Olivier's class as an actor, but he's fresh—and has made a magnificent film. (12/4/89)* **Roger & Me.** *A documentary—sly and witty but basically angry—about the hardships in Flint, Michigan, brought on by GM plant closings. Michael Moore, who made it, hangs the film on his attempts to see Roger Smith, GM president. (1/22/90)* **—SK**

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roars through the sequence.

He treats everything in the film with immediacy and force. The sequence in a field hospital is chilling. The episodes in the veterans' hospital are disgusting, in what they disclose of filth and neglect and in what they disclose of government neglect of such a hospital. The quarrels in the Kovic family after Ron returns, chair-bound yet rampaging, are ripped out of the insides of the people involved. The Mexican scenes are a Walpurgisnacht of the maimed, rightly obscene, that climaxes in a fight between Kovic and Dafoe in their wheelchairs out in the middle of the desert. Even though the scene is a set piece, somewhat patently designed to be Beckettian, the design works.

Yet for all its stinging and slashing, its particular truths, the film doesn't register as a whole because the screenplay is fuzzy. The opening—the ten-year-old Ron playing war games in the woods with his pals—is a ham-handed prediction of what is to come, and the Fourth of July parade in his Long Island town is still another row of platitudes set up to be bowled over. The film could easily and more tightly begin with Kovic in high school, on the wrestling team, sopping up all the sloganeering about the Vietnam War, simmering to enlist—because of simple patriotism but also to some degree because he's a strong young man full of physicality who wants the chance to use his physical being in a seemingly glamorous way.

The crux of the film—its thematic reason for being—is the agon out of which Kovic changed from a gung-ho volunteer-and-veteran into an anti-war activist. We don't really see this change. We see the veteran whose response to any criticism of America is "love it or leave it." We see him—in his chair, of course—visit his high school sweetheart, now a student at Syracuse University where he finds her immersed in anti-war activity. But we're not shown that she has much influence on him. Later, after the Mexican episode, he has changed. After the change, we see him try, with co-believers, to enter the Republican National Convention in Miami in 1972 to present anti-war views (a sequence of jostling anger on both sides). And four years later, at the close, we see him wheeling toward the platform to address the Democratic convention. But the film skimps the change itself, the ideational climax. Without this capstone, the film is a series of segments, without architectural completion.

Nonetheless, the heat in the film is almost palpable as we sit before it. Stone, Kovic, Cruise, and all the others reached deep inside to make this picture, and it earns something more than respect. •

Robert Brustein on Theater

Jewish Metaphysics

Lincoln Center Theater is currently engaged, upstairs and downstairs, with plays deriving from Jewish metaphysics, which is to say with devils, demons, and dybbuks. This represents more unity than we've yet seen from this normally eclectic (I hesitate to say expedient) institution. Paddy Chayefsky's **The Tenth Man** at the Vivian Beaumont is 30 years old, while the two one-act pieces by David Mamet and Shel Silverstein, produced at the smaller Mitzi E. Newhouse under the collective title **Oh, Hell**, are brand new.

It's nice to find Lincoln Center Theater back at the ranch house after sorties around various Broadway corrals, and even nicer to be able to detect some consistent artistic direction following several early years of vagueness and improvisation. The emerging policy would seem to be American revivals in the larger theater and new American plays downstairs, which pretty much reflects the aesthetic preferences of artistic director Gregory Mosher. The schedule will no doubt vary to accommodate the odd South African offering, possibly some classics, an occasional new play from abroad—but no one minds a few departures once you make some effort at self-definition.

This policy will not satisfy New York's need for a repertory acting company, but it may help to distinguish the goals of Lincoln Center Theater from the aims of current Broadway producers. Its production of *The Tenth Man*, on the other hand, evokes the ghost of Broadway past in the spectral shape of Paddy Chayefsky. Chayefsky is an enigma. His tough-minded screenwriting—particularly movies like *The Hospital* and *Network* (and possibly even *Altered States*)—is far superior to his earlier writing for the theater, which was invariably squishy, portentous, domesticated midcult. Having grown to admire Chayefsky from his movies, I was hoping to like this revival of *The Tenth Man* a lot better than Tyrone Guthrie's 1959 production, which gave me heartburn. Ulu Grosbard's is a stronger version on the whole, but it hasn't improved my dyspeptic condition. *The Tenth Man* remains an indigestible dose of mystical kitsch and boiled-cabbage kabbalism.

The play was originally written to amuse a suburban audience with ambiguous feelings toward its immigrant forebears—the kind of assimilated Jews that Philip Roth satirized in his early stories. The action takes place in a ramshackle synagogue in Mineola whose Orthodox worshipers are full of disdain for Reform Jews who "sit around like Episcopalians, listening to organ music." Yet, perhaps in deference to these same Jews (who after all constituted his audience), the playwright has the congregation pray not in Hebrew but in English, put on "phylacteries" rather than *t'fillin*, and seek out "quorums" instead of *minyans*. Chayefsky's version of Yiddish humor is also dispensed in assimilationist translation, most of it based on the bewildering impact of bustling New York on cloistered innocents from the Old Country. There are jokes about cemetery plots, the decline of Orthodoxy, and ungrateful daughters-in-law, the most successful being an extended vaudeville shtick concerning two Jews who never before strayed from Mineola trying to find the right subway to Williamsburg and always ending up in New Jersey.

Instead of being practical and realistic, in other words, Chayefsky's Jews are simple, loveable, and filled with mystical awe—suitable qualities for their role as affectionate Dwarfs to the play's hapless Snow White. Here Snow White is called Evelyn, a disturbed girl spirited from an asylum by her grandfather, while the Wicked Stepmother is Current Scientific Error in the shape of rational Freudianism. To accommodate the playwright's preference for supernatural explanations of psychological afflictions, the main plot is a variant of Ansky's *The Dybbuk* without tears, with Evelyn's paranoid hallucinations interpreted as demonic possession (the dybbuk being a vengeful Kiev whore named Hannah).

When a young man enters, defeated, cynical, suicidal—an unbelieving analysand disillusioned with life and love—Evelyn offers to marry him. In his presence, the girl's distemper takes a somewhat different form. She thinks she's a de Mille movie star. Not surprisingly, he thinks she's psychotic. When he finds the marriage impractical, she concludes that he too is possessed of a dybbuk that will not allow him to feel. In the ceremony

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that follows, it is his demon that is exorcised, and capable now of love, he prepares to cure the girl with the strength of his passion.

"He still doesn't believe in God," observes the exorcist, "he just wants to love. And when you think of it, gentlemen, is there any difference?" This is the way that problems of madness, suicide, and anomie were resolved in the theater of the late 1950s, no doubt along with coronaries, carcinomas, and the cold war. Presumably, the rite of exorcism was also a simpler matter 30 years ago, when demons were more benign. The possessed heroine of *The Tenth Man* is hardly obliged to vomit green slime or rotate her head 360 degrees. In Chayefsky's symphonic metaphysics, diabolism is largely an occasion for romantic scherzos with the orchestra playing variations on "All You Need Is Love."

Grosbard's Chagall-like production manages to capture some of the schmaltz-herring flavor of the play with the help of seasoned acting by Joseph Wiseman, Jack Weston, Sidney Armus, Ron Rifkin, Alan Manson, and Bob Dishy. Dishy—doing a variant of his sour waiter in *Cafe Crown*—is particularly endearing as a socialist-atheist who hangs out at the *schul* because he has nothing better to do. His hooded eyes, bent back, and grim-set lips add a note of reality to an otherwise fanciful evening. Peter Friedman also sours the pot a little in the part of the young man (the first of Chayefsky's suicidal heroes), but there's no particular electricity flowing between him and Phoebe Cates, who stumbles over the uncontracted dialogue of Evelyn and the Slavic flourishes of her Kiev dybbuk. I liked Santo Loquasto's set, though, with its grimy windows and linoleum floor flecked with traces of old paint, and the new thrust configuration of the Beaumont is a fine solution to a once forbidding space.

Downstairs at the Mitzi E. Newhouse there's more about guilt and redemption in the form of Mamet's and Silverstein's short plays. Actually, it's more accurate to call Silverstein's **The Devil and Billy Markham** a musical-narrative monologue on the order of *The Face on the Barroom Floor* or *Dangerous Dan McGrew*; I suspect it reads a lot better than it plays. This is not the fault of the performer, Dennis Locorriere of the Doctor Hook group, who sings and speaks the piece with unflagging energy (he has the grating voice and matted hair of Nick Nolte in *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*). It's simply that the ear soon tires of dactylic quatrains and the unvaried adventures of the raunchy hero in hell.

Mamet's **Bobby Gould in Hell** is also concerned with a damaged stud doomed to the infernal regions. It is receiving a more elaborate production and has more substance as a play—but not much. Mamet's dramatic genius is beyond dispute, and his place in our theater is assured, but now that he's entering the mainstream, he should beware of losing his edge. *Bobby Gould in Hell*, like his movie *Things Change*, is a *pièce rose*, rather than a *pièce noir* like *American Buffalo* or *Glengarry Glen Ross*; and I'm not so great a fan of his whimsy as I am of his scalpel-like incisions into the body politic. The eponymous hero of *Bobby Gould in Hell* bears the same name as the sleazy producer of *Speed-the-Plow*, but he's hardly the same character. Joe Montegna's Bobby Gould was a ruthless, fast-talking manipulator prepared to sacrifice friendship to expediency, and vulnerable only to sexual confidence games. Treat Williams's version of the character is oddly diffident and defensive, shy and puzzled in his bathrobe and pajamas, hardly a candidate for such remorseless diabolical attention.

This attention is provided by the Devil himself—assertively played by W. H. Macy as a humorless, impatient "Interrogator" in a red beard and long rubber boots. He'd been headed for a fishing trip but something "bad" called him down to Bobby's well-appointed apartment. Although the Devil wants him to confess to evil behavior (including a threat to put a toaster up his girlfriend's tush), Bobby will only admit to being "a straight-B sort of man." Still, every time he tries to escape through the door of his own apartment, he is confronted with a blast of smoke and flames from the pyrotechnic department.

But what is Bobby guilty of? Perhaps he didn't call his uncle when he came down with the flu. When the girlfriend of toaster fame materializes, wearing a pink wrapper, sucking a lollipop, and wielding a TV remote control, we learn that Bobby "screwed me and he told me he was going to call up, and he never called up." Not much of consequence there either. The Devil is ready to give up and sign his release. "Why do we sin?" he asks, and Bobby answers, "I think we're lonely—I think we want God to notice us." Finally, Bobby learns the true reason for his damnation. He always acted as if whatever he did was good. The Devil concludes, "You are a bad man. You were cruel without being interesting." Having confessed his sin and said he was sorry, Bobby is allowed to go home, while the Devil says, "And the rest of you folks—catch you later."

The confrontation between Bobby and the Devil is similar to that between Peer Gynt and the Button Moulder. Both men are remorseful mediocrities, guilty of half-and-halfness, of failing to be either a great saint or a great sinner. But Bobby is a much less interesting figure than Peer, and Mamet is a much more forceful writer when dealing with extremes of human behavior (as he demonstrates most powerfully in *Some Freaks*, a series of essays filled with complicated probes into himself and his contemporaries). *Bobby Gould in Hell* has some value as a jeu d'esprit. But in this play, our most gifted playwright seems to be doing practice jumps on the board before his next plunge into the dark turbulent waters of American life. •

The Intelligence Test

BY ROBERT WRIGHT

Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History by Stephen Jay Gould

(W. W. Norton, 347 pp., $19.95)

The acclaim for Stephen Jay Gould is just shy of being universal. He was among the first to win a MacArthur Foundation "genius" award. His lectures are renowned among Harvard undergraduates for their wit and erudition. His monthly column in *Natural History* has a devout following, and when his essays are anthologized (*The Panda's Thumb*, *The Flamingo's Smile*, etc.), the reviews are reliably favorable and the sales enduringly brisk. All told, Gould probably commands the largest and most enthusiastic readership of any evolutionist in this century. But within one small audience, the cheers are muted. A number of evolutionary biologists complain—to each other, or to journalists off the record—that Gould has warped the public perception of their field.

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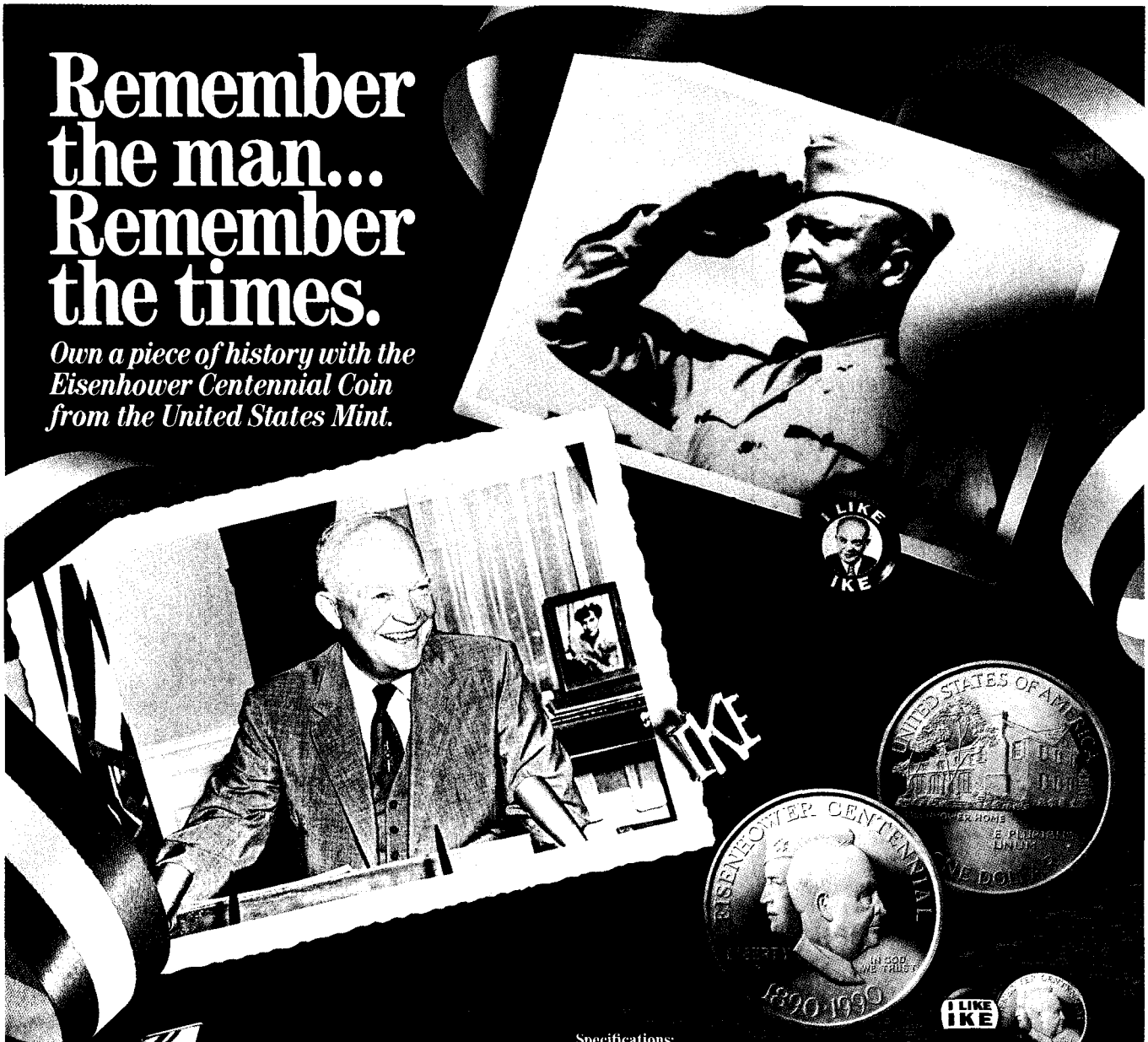

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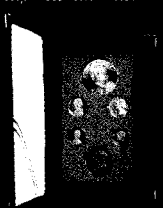

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ten incur the hostility of their less famous colleagues, and the complaints are fairly predictable: he oversimplifies in order to reach a large audience, he sacrifices precision for literary flourish. But in this case the indictment is a little meatier. For one thing, there is the occasional suggestion that Gould's political ideology has colored his view of evolution (a possibility that Gould himself, actually, was the first to raise). For another, there is the claim that Gould has self-servingly misrepresented the opinions of Charles Darwin—more than a misdemeanor for a person in Gould's line of work. And these issues are magnified by Gould's stature. He is, after all, America's evolutionist laureate. If he has been systematically misleading America about what evolution is and what it means, that amounts to a lot of intellectual damage.

Any good grounds for the charges against Gould should be visible in a book like *Wonderful Life*. The book—it is an original composition, not an anthology—is billed by Gould's publisher as his magnum opus, "a summation of two decades of his work in paleontology and the history of life." It recapitulates Gould's favorite themes, touches once again on the question of Darwin's rightful legacy, and revisits many issues that, academic as they may sound, have ideological import: the pace of evolution, the role that "chance" plays in it, and the direction, if any, in which evolution tends to move.

Gould's central goal in this book is to demolish once and for all the comfortable notion that the human species is Darwinianly ordained—that we, the only self-conscious animals, sit at the pinnacle of evolution, and that, indeed, the whole point of evolution may in some sense have been to reach this pinnacle. There is no ladder of evolution, Gould insists, no necessary path of rising biological complexity and sentience; the coming of self-conscious intelligence was not inexorable, or even very likely. Rather, our species exists by virtue of a long series of lucky evolutionary breaks. If you rewound the tape of organic history and edited out any one of those breaks, all subsequent evolution would be radically altered. "Replay the tape a million times," he writes, "and I doubt that anything like *Homo sapiens* would ever evolve again."

This is an arresting thesis, but Gould never comes close to making the case for it. To be sure, he's right in saying that there's no simple "ladder" of evolution, and that there's nothing literally inexorable about the evolution of intelligence. But there is a plausible argument that the coming of self-conscious intelligence was nonetheless quite likely from the beginning, and Gould never succeeds in casting any doubt on it. Indeed, he never even confronts the argument straightforwardly—a fact that, given what this book is supposed to be about, is nothing short of weird.

To understand how Gould's thesis intersects with political ideology, and how centrally it figures in his whole conception of evolution, you have to understand how Darwinism was distorted during the late 19th and early 20th centuries for political and religious purposes. After the publication of *Origin of the Species* in 1859, those clergymen who didn't reject the theory of natural selection outright tried to reconcile it with their faith. One approach was to view evolution as divinely driven—as a long and slow, but steady and inexorable march up the hill of organic complexity and intelligence, toward an animal worthy of admission to heaven. This solution to the crisis of Christian confidence was nicely adaptable to the needs of those on the right who wanted to defend capitalism in its rawest, cruelest form. The result was social Darwinism: if evolution was God's will, then the survival of the fittest, with all the attendant suffering, must be morally justified in the name of progress; with people as well as other animals, it must be all right for some to starve while others thrive. Racism and imperialism found comparable comfort; any God who had designed natural selection, it was said, would surely agree that "inferior" nations and races deserve conquest and oppression. These religious and political forces—along, no doubt, with some honest incomprehension—reinforced the simplistic equation of natural selection with inevitable progress toward a preordained goal.

Though this "progressivist" view of evolution hasn't been common among biologists for many decades, Gould has spent a good part of his career combatting it. It is a recurring theme in his *Natural History* columns, and it is an intended victim of the much-publicized "theory of punctuated equilibrium," which Gould co-authored. The theory holds basically that evolution proceeds in jumps and starts and somewhat chaotically: species go for long periods with little or no change, and then "suddenly" (which in evolutionary terms can mean many thousands of years) they change dramatically, often splitting into two or more new species. And these transformations, Gould stresses, don't necessarily sustain any previous trajectory of development. The upshot is an evolution that's jerky and aimless—a process that doesn't proceed smoothly, much less smoothly *toward* anything.

It was the theory of punctuated equilibrium that got Gould accused of putting words in Darwin's mouth. Aided by obliging journalists, Gould billed the theory as a sharp departure from the "gradualist" view of evolution purportedly held by Darwin and his intellectual descendants. But, as Richard Dawkins showed in his essay "Puncturing punctuationism" (in *The Blind Watchmaker*), the main contours of this "radical" theory had long been accepted by people Gould calls gradualists, notably Darwin himself. Darwin's repeated emphasis on the "gradual" nature of evolution was only for the slower students—people who couldn't quite fathom how you get an organ as complex as, say, an eyeball through incremental change. Very, very slowly, he replied. But Darwin was fully aware that the rate of evolution varies wildly in response to changing conditions. As he himself put it, "The periods, during which species have undergone modification, though long as measured by years, have probably been short in comparison with the periods during which they retain the same form." This quotation doesn't match up too neatly with Gould's assertion in *Natural History* that Darwin believed evolutionary change to be "generally slow, steady, gradual, and continuous."

Certainly the theory of punctuated equilibrium has its genuine novelties. For example, though almost everyone concedes the importance of rapid bursts of evolution, Gould places unusual emphasis on them, and he insists on minimizing intermittent, slower forms of change. But by and large the theory's novelties haven't impressed top-flight biologists. Today punctuationism remains a fairly hot topic within paleontology, Gould's field, but within evolutionary biology it is considered by many to be little more than a curiosity.

What had attracted Gould to the theory of punctuated equilibrium? Back in the 1970s, when he unveiled the theory, he used to note that "my daddy raised me a Marxist", and talk about the natural affinity between punctuationism, with its emphasis on periodic revolutionary upheavals, and a Marxist view of history. Both, he has written, embody the "law of transformation of quantity into quality"—"when you heat up water it boils at a certain point . . . and, if you oppress the workers more and more, eventually this leads to revolution." Gould made viewing biology through Marxist lenses sound only fair; many biologists who emphasize more gradual evolution, he noted, have probably been subcon-

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sciously influenced by *their* ideology—by a belief in plodding social change that comes from within the system. Indeed, a Marxist slant on change, he seemed to feel, leaves less of a taint than an ameliorist slant. In 1978, speaking at a "Dialectics Workshop" at Harvard, Gould said that gradualism, "arising largely out of pervasive political bias," has been "a restraining dogma" in discouraging radical social change. But he characterized punctuationism "not as a dogma but as an alternate or pluralistic widening of the ways we look at change." Get the distinction?

Since becoming a well-known popular writer, Gould has been less vocal about his politics. He is no longer associated with Science for the People, the Cambridge-based activist group that he worked with during the late 1970s, notably in launching some rather nasty attacks on fellow Harvard faculty member E. O. Wilson, whose book, *Sociobiology*, Gould deemed to have right-wing tendencies. And in recent years, when asked whether he's a Marxist, Gould has replied that he doesn't like "labels." But in a sense the issue of Marxism, for all the muttering that Gould's more ardent detractors do about it, isn't that important. Quite aside from a Marxist view of historical change, one can see a separate attraction that any leftist—or any centrist, or, for that matter, any humane conservative—might feel toward a doctrine that promises to weaken the basis for social Darwinism. The question is whether scientists should succumb to such extrascientific attractions, and whether Gould does. Or, more realistically (given that scientists are only human), the question is how successful scientists can hope to be in resisting such temptations, and whether Gould seems to be making an earnest effort at resistance.

Gould, in any event, spends much of *Wonderful Life* indicting another scientist for failure to resist. The book's narrative drive lies mainly in Gould's claim that the story's chief antagonist—Charles D. Walcott, head of the Smithsonian Institution from 1907 to 1927—was steered into a huge, philosophically consequential, scientific blunder by his political and religious beliefs. Walcott's error was made in deciphering fossils from the Burgess Shale, a limestone quarry in British Columbia. The shale holds a rich record of life just after the "Cambrian explosion," the period around 600 million years ago when multicellular life, then in its infancy, exhibited a sudden (as these things go) profusion of diverse forms. The shale contains around 75,000 specimens of at least 140 species. They were tiny creatures, an inch or two long, that lived underwater.

Walcott discovered the fossils in 1909, and then produced a taxonomic classification of them that went essentially unchallenged until the 1970s, when a group of British researchers showed that he had been wrong. His mistake, Gould explains, was in "shoehorning" the fossils into pre-existing categories; Walcott assumed that these animals were ancestors of existing species, that they belonged somewhere on the family tree of modern life. They might belong near the base of a main branch, or even lower, near the bottom of the trunk, but they could be squeezed in somewhere.

It turns out, however, that they can't be. Apparently many didn't evolve into anything lasting and don't fit anywhere along the conventional lineage. Judging by the Burgess Shale, then, it looks as if many, perhaps most, of the branches on the tree of early life got lopped off. What's more, it wasn't through any fault of their own. The design of the doomed species wasn't grossly flawed, Gould says: no one could have predicted which would survive and which would fail. It seems that they just ran into bad luck—a sudden ecological twist for which their past evolution had ill prepared them. Thus, the moral of the story of the Bur-

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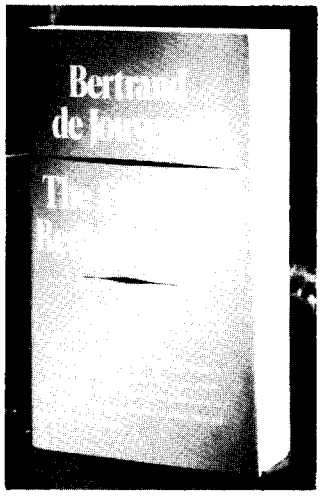

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gess Shale, as told by Gould, is very much in keeping with the moral of the theory of punctuated equilibrium. Species are frequently eliminated by "lottery," he says, and these virtually random events can fundamentally redirect evolution. Once again, Gould finds evolution to be a chaotic, directionless process.

And once again, he attributes claims to the contrary—Walcott's in this case—to subconscious bias. Walcott was a politically conservative and religious man. And, though Gould never convincingly shows Walcott's politics affecting his science, the role of his religion seems clear. Walcott wrote of God as "revealing Himself through countless ages in the development of the earth as an abode for man and in the age-long inbreathing of life into its constituent matter, culminating in man with his spiritual nature and all his God-like power." So is it surprising, asks Gould, that Walcott should see all the Burgess creatures as fitting neatly into the evolutionary march toward humanity?

Gould's probably right: Walcott's religion may well have warped his judgment. But to grant that a belief in the inevitability of evolved intelligence encouraged a misreading of the Burgess Shale is not to concede that the correct reading belies such inevitability. Once Gould's morality play is over, his argument still hasn't been made. He keeps promising that his interpretation of the Burgess Shale will lead to a "radical view about the pathways of life and the nature of history," but it never does.

The radical change Gould thinks he's ushering in is a shift in the "iconography" of evolution. Not only, he says, should we quit thinking of evolution as a ladder, leading to a specific preordained end (which, actually, pretty much everyone in science quit doing a long time ago); we should quit thinking of evolution as a robust, well-rounded tree, with all branches steadily subdividing along the way to create more kinds of life, and each branch heading toward greater organic complexity. This icon—"the cone of increasing diversity," he calls it—seems to give too much comfort to any remaining progressivists for Gould's taste, and, he says, it is belied by the many broken branches found near the bottom of the tree in the Burgess Shale. Indeed, these dead branches, Gould suggests, represent such a breadth of morphological diversity (broader, perhaps, than the current array of marine invertebrates) that the image of a tree, with its unified trunk, breaks down entirely. "Life is a copiously branching bush, continually pruned by the grim reaper of extinction," he writes. And: "The history of life is a story of massive removal followed by differentiation within a few surviving stocks, not the conventional tale of steadily increasing excellence, complexity, and diversity."

Bush, tree, cone—what's the difference? Not as much as Gould thinks. Granted, the Burgess Shale suggests that most of the branches at the bottom of the bush/tree of life never got very far. Gould's point, it seems, is that those doomed branches—broken off, perhaps, by some bit of bad luck, such as a geological or climatic upheaval—could just as easily have been *our* branches; *our* ancestors could have lost the "lottery." Or—since these prunings take place at various levels of the bush/tree—our ancestors could have been erased well after the Cambrian, perhaps even recently. And then where would we be?

Nowhere, obviously. But that's not news. Few biologists would deny that any number of chancy events could have altered evolution, perhaps so dramatically that nothing human—you know, five or six feet tall, hair under the arms, toenails—would have evolved. The real question is: Would *any* form of highly intelligent life have evolved if humans hadn't? Did the basic laws of natural selection make it highly probable that *eventually some* organism would have become conscious of itself, and even of the process that created it? Is great intelligence, generically speaking, inherent—or, at least virtually inherent—in evolution? For most of the book, Gould purports to be interested in that question. Yet he studiously avoids tackling it head on.

Had he done so, he would have had to face a few basic facts about evolution that seem to make him uncomfortable. The first of these is that evolution *does* exhibit a tendency toward rising organic complexity (along, often, with a growth in the size of organisms). An irresistible impetus? No. But a tendency? Definitely. All species have grown more complex through time; otherwise, they wouldn't be where they are today. True, a few species (some internal parasites, for example) have done some backsliding, and become slightly less complex through evolution. And many others go long periods of time, conceivably forever, without growing more complex. And, obviously, some large and complex species die out. But to the extent that organic complexity within a particular lineage changes through natural selection, the change is almost always upward. And on the cutting edge of complexity—among the most complex (and often largest) animals in a particular group—there is very often change. Whether you view evolution as a bush or a tree, you have to admit that its branches head generally upward.

And the reason isn't some immaterial élan vital, or anything mystical or supernatural, but rather the concrete advantages often conferred on an organism by greater complexity (the efficient division of cellular labor, for example) and greater size (which sometimes, in turn, dictates greater structural complexity). You don't have to see divine guidance in evolution to see some general patterns in it.

A companion basic fact about evolution—which Gould also prefers not to acknowledge—is that the complexity of organic information processing (in brains, notably) also tends to grow. For reasons now fairly well understood, the processing of information is fundamental to life. Even bacteria, which sit squarely at the bottom of the evolutionary tree (OK, OK, bush), absorb and process data about their environment in order to adjust to it. And once an organism is processing information, there are advantages to be gained by processing it more voluminously and complexly—greater flexibility in coping with threats, in finding food, etc. As with the growth of complexity, the evolutionary "pressure" toward greater intelligence is not irresistible. There are many reasons that many species don't get smarter with time. Maybe the species has a nice, comfortable niche already; maybe the niche "above" is occupied; maybe the needed genetic mutation just doesn't happen. Still, when the complexity of a species' information processing changes through evolution, the change is almost always upward. Across the mammalian class broadly—not just among us primates—evolution has been raising the brain-to-body ratio for a long time now.

A third basic fact about evolution is its tremendous inventiveness. As the mammoth diversity of organic form and behavior on this planet suggests, natural selection has quite a knack for "sensing" empty niches (or, strictly speaking, stumbling onto them blindly) and filling them. Thus evolution should tend not merely to create bigger, more complex, and smarter animals, but to apply this complexity and intelligence in a wide variety of ways.

I doubt Gould would admit it, but all three of these basic facts about evolution are beautifully borne out by the Burgess Shale. If we judge by the shale's fossils, as Gould wants us to, it appears that the diverse array of Cambrian multicellular life was ravaged by "decimation," as he calls it, and that such decimation has periodically revisited the bush of life. Yet even faced with these setbacks,

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evolution has flourished, generating a wide range of simple and, increasingly, complex organisms, and filling just about every obvious large-scale niche: there is life in water, life on land, life underground, life in the trees, life in the air (wings have been invented several different times by natural selection); there is multimedia information gathering and sharing—via sound, physical contact, smell, taste, and light (eyes have been invented dozens of times). Gould's choice of words in insisting that life is a bush continually "pruned" by extinction is more apt than he realizes: you cut off one branch, and the other branches flourish all the more, rapidly filling some of the ecological space that the missing branch otherwise would have occupied.

In short, what Gould seems to consider central to his argument is more or less irrelevant to it. He can talk all he wants (and he does) about the role of "contingency" in natural history, about how some quirky ecological circumstance can send the branches of evolution zigzagging in odd directions, or even snip them off. (The book's title comes from the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, in which a handful of Jimmy Stewart's decisions turn out to have redirected the evolution of an entire town.) But if the overall direction of the bush's branches, after all the zigzagging and dying out are done, is toward complexity and intelligence, then how much bearing does this "contingency" have on the thesis that the evolution of highly intelligent life was highly unlikely?

Gould can respond to this question in either macro- or micro- terms. He can either (*a*) attack one or more of the above three generalizations about evolution, or claim they don't really add up to the image of a bush growing generally upward, or perhaps contend that there is some fundamental limit on the bush's likely growth; or (*b*) go down the evolutionary bush and show how at critical junctures the flow of life might well have—indeed, probably would have—veered away from the evolution of intelligence had circumstances been slightly different. Remarkably, Gould goes the whole book without doing (*a*), perhaps because addressing these three generalizations would require him first to utter them, which I gather he can't bring himself to do, so redolent are they—in his mind, at least—of the dreaded progressivism. But he does, in the book's last chapter, finally get around to (*b*): examining specific junctures of human evolution and arguing that evolution was actually quite unlikely to head, as it repeatedly did, in the direction of greater intelligence.

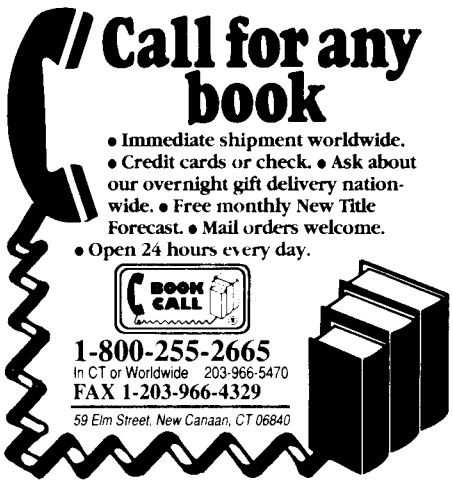
Look at our recent evolutionary history, says Gould. Note that even as our ancestors, early *Homo sapiens*, flourished, other pretenders to the throne—Neanderthals, Asian *Homo erectus*—fell by the wayside. Well, what if we, too, had shared their bad luck? Then there wouldn't be anything smarter than chimps.

Not so fast. Gould neglects to mention the distinct possibility that the evolutionary success of *Homo sapiens* was the source of the Neanderthal's demise. It sometimes happens that as a species flourishes, it displaces a species that occupies roughly the same niche; the second species either finds another niche or dies out. Once our ancestors began wielding tools deftly, engaging in long-term planning, and coordinating social endeavors (hunting, say), life probably became harder for other upright primates in the vicinity—especially if, as is quite possible, our ancestors were busy clubbing them to death and eating them. So if our little evolutionary twig had snapped, the Neanderthal twig, or some other similar twig, might well have gone on to extend the evolutionary envelope of intelligence.

Bizarrely, Gould dismisses the possibility that Neanderthals would have ever achieved great intelligence by noting that they, unlike *Homo sapiens* of their age, hadn't invented the calendar stick or the counting blade, and, judging by their caves, they "knew nothing of representational art." Those brutes! But of course, the same had once been true of *Homo sapiens*. That's the way evolution works: one day you're not so smart, and then, a few thousand generations later, you're pretty smart. What the Neanderthals *did* have was a proficiency with tools, and as Gould must surely know, this adds considerably to the evolutionary pressure favoring greater intelligence.

Long before Neanderthals, actually, the pressure for intelligence had been great. Even if all species of the genus *Homo* had perished, my strong hunch is that some other primate would have eventually taken up the torch. Consider chimps. They use rudimentary tools (twigs to collect and eat termites, stones to break open nuts); their survival can depend on fairly complex communication (vocal and otherwise); and their social dynamics establish a correlation between cleverness and reproductive success (a male's access to mates may be secured through subtle scheming involving the formation of convenient alliances and the undercutting of a rival's social status; a female's reproductive success depends in various ways on her judgment and cleverness). All these things bode well for the evolution of higher intelligence.

But you probably won't hear much about this from Gould. For these evolutionary pressures are manifested in slow, tediously incremental, but ultimately significant change—through the elimination (or failure to reproduce) of individuals within a species generation by generation, not through the sudden elimination of an entire species or the relatively sudden branching off of a new species. No environmental cataclysm is necessary (though one may help). And this sort of "gradualist" evolution Gould would rather minimize in favor of punc-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tuationism. This emphasis is unfortunate—partly because it seems unwarranted by the evidence, but also for a quite different reason: often the logic behind the most subtle, least cataclysmic, forms of evolution is the most intellectually beautiful. It is a shame that America's foremost popularizer of Darwinism is ill-disposed to share a large part of evolution's elegance with the public.

If you somehow wiped out all the primates, I wouldn't put it past, say, wolves or lions—whose lineages have thus far grown in intelligence, after all—to have great-great-great etc. grandchildren who would play Pac-Man (or Pac-Wolf). But suppose all mammals had died out. Gould speculates that if the dinosaurs hadn't run into some bad luck and perished, then mammals, which at that time were just small furry nuisances from the dinosaur's point of view, might never have made anything of themselves.

Maybe so. Maybe not. There's simply no way of knowing. But, anyway, who's to say that the dinosaurs themselves wouldn't have someday attained great intelligence? It now looks as though some of the bigger-brained dinosaurs could stand upright and use grasping forepaws, and that some dinosaurs may have been at least quasi-warm-blooded and cared for their young. But Gould smoothly dismisses the dinosaur scenario. "Since the dinosaurs were not moving toward *markedly* larger brains, and since such a prospect *may* lie outside the capabilities of reptilian design, we must assume that consciousness would not have evolved on our planet if a cosmic catastrophe had not claimed the dinosaurs as victims [emphasis added]." What a strange thing for a co-author of the theory of punctuated equilibrium to say! If evolution passes through long periods of stasis, and then witnesses dramatic change overnight, what is the point of extrapolating from gradual trends? How could a punctuationist ever say with confidence that an animal was not "moving toward" *anything*?

But the strangest of Gould's logical inconsistencies occurs in the final paragraphs of the book, where he makes the case that not just mammals but all vertebrates were just plain lucky to escape the dustheap of history. He notes that among the fossils of the Burgess shale is one called *Pikaia*. And *Pikaia* is a member of the phylum Chordata, which includes vertebrates. Is *Pikaia*, then, the missing link, whose survival is the reason that all vertebrates, including us, exist? Well, actually, no, Gould admits. "I do not, of course, claim that *Pikaia* itself is the actual ancestor of vertebrates, nor would I be foolish enough to state that all opportunity for a chordate future resided with *Pikaia* in the Middle Cambrian . . ."

Yet in the very next paragraph Gould states exactly that: "Wind the tape of life back to Burgess times, and let it play again. If *Pikaia* does not survive in the replay, we are wiped out of future history—all of us, from shark to robin to orangutan." And again, in the book's final paragraph: "And so, if you wish to ask the question of the ages—why do humans exist?—a major part of the answer, touching those aspects of the issue that science can treat at all, must be: because *Pikaia* survived the Burgess decimation."

I have read these passages five times now, and I still can't see a way to close this immense discrepancy. Did Gould just mean to be metaphorical in the last two paragraphs? If so, dropping a hint to that effect would have been a nice touch. More likely is that here Gould has unconsciously succumbed to the tension that is tangible in much of his writing: between maintaining his scientific credentials and wowing a lay audience. He wants to make sweeping, dramatic statements that will leave readers agog, yet he can't be seen by his peers making the facile assumptions that such drama often requires.

Gould has previously pushed his luck in trying to have it both ways, and has paid the price; among some evolutionary biologists, his reputation has suffered as a result of the caricature of Darwin's thinking he invoked to convince lay readers that punctuationism was radically new. This time, it seems, he has gone further. He has sent plainly contradictory messages to his two cherished audiences. And, inadvisedly, he has sent them in consecutive paragraphs.

In a sense, though, this is not the most abject surrender he makes in this book to the pressure of trying to please all the people all the time. That comes when, in the penultimate chapter, he suddenly backtracks on what had until then seemed to be one of his central claims. For most of the book, the reader has been led to believe that Gould is talking about the predictability not merely of human intelligence, but of *any* sort of higher intelligence. At the outset, in the most explicit formulation of his thesis, Gould couches it in terms of human evolution per se, but he thereafter goes on to talk repeatedly in terms of the "eventual origin of self-conscious intelligence," or the "predictable evolution of consciousness." Then, 30 pages from the end, he seems to realize that, however much this bolder version of his thesis may dazzle the average book buyer, he hasn't come close to making an academically respectable argument for it. So, in a last-minute disclaimer that is virtually muttered under his breath, he admits, basically, that he was just kidding.

The admission comes as he is talking about the boundary between the inevitable and the contingent—between those features of life that follow from the basic dynamics of evolution, and those that are the result of happenstance. The evolution of *human* life, he is confident, falls below the boundary, in the realm of the contingent. But, he adds, nonchalantly: "Whether the evolutionary origin of self-conscious intelligence *in any form* lies above or below the boundary, I simply do not know [emphasis added]. All we can say is that our planet has never come close a second time."

Then what was the point of writing this book? As I've said, virtually everyone concedes that a well-timed drought or some other evolutionary obstacle might have blocked *our* species' particular route to intelligence. That hasn't been an issue since the looniest, most flagrantly teleological views of evolution were put to rest. The only remaining question (and the only philosophically important question, really) is whether evolution would have eventually followed alternative routes to intelligence anyway.

Even as Gould shrinks from addressing this prospect head on, note how facilely he tries to minimize it: "All we can say is that our planet has never come close a second time." This is a fairly disingenuous thing for a paleontologist to say. In paleontological time, the 250,000 years of *Homo sapiens*' existence is little more than a few seconds. It would be eerie indeed if two widely divergent paths to intelligence, having taken so long to get there, arrived at the same moment. Have some patience, for God's sake. The journey from a single-celled animal to a bird, to a dog, to a bear, to a chimp, took a few hundred million years. By Gould's own estimate, the Earth will probably be around another five *billion* years. Doesn't that leave time for a bit more action on the evolutionary front?

You could probably explain a certain number of the inconsistencies and intellectual evasions in this book by reference to time-honored popularizer's temptations: Gould likes high drama and literary flourish, and he likes to be seen brilliantly demolishing whole pillars of Western thought. So it's natural that he should make the pillars seem more important, and the demolitions more brilliant, than they really are. (In *Wonderful Life* he makes the pillar in question look important not only by acting as if progressivism is still a force in science, but by arguing—very ineffectually—that

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Darwin himself harbored some progressivist sentiments.) But it's a little suspicious how often these pillars seem to be supporting an ideology Gould finds abhorrent. And if you go through his past writing, you'll see this happen repeatedly: there is a bad doctrine, usually associated with a bad guy (Charles Walcott is only the latest), and then there's Stephen Jay Gould, the good guy holding up the good doctrine.

Again, it isn't Gould's cause that is objectionable; none of us wants Darwinism misused to justify racial oppression, or income inequality, or anything else. But trying to snuff out reactionary politics by distorting evolution simply won't work. Gould can keep pretending, as he did with punctuated equilibrium and has now done with the Burgess Shale, to have a view of evolution that's so radical as to single-handedly undermine social Darwinism. But eventually the truth will come out: his view is less radical and original than it's billed as being, and some of its most original parts are its shakiest. So we're back to mainstream Darwinism, and to the initial question: Is there any logical basis for reading right-wing messages into conventional ideas about how evolution works?

Fortunately, the answer is no. In fact, there is no basis for reading *any* political messages into the dynamics of evolution, or, even more generally, for extracting any ideals from the workings of nature. And there's no real controversy on this point. The illegitimacy of inferring "ought" from "is" has been a matter of virtual consensus in both science and philosophy for the better part of this century. It should go without saying that inferring "is" from "ought" is also illegitimate. •

The Blinds Come Tumbling Up

By John B. Judis

And the Walls Came Tumbling Down: An Autobiography by Ralph David Abernathy

(Harper & Row, 640 pp., $25)

During the 14 years that he was Martin Luther King Jr.'s closest friend and ally, Ralph David Abernathy occupied a high historical plateau, but after King's death in 1968, Abernathy tumbled into a chasm of failure and irrelevance. Under Abernathy, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which he and King had founded in 1957, lost members and influence, until Abernathy himself was forced to resign as president in 1977. In 1980, probably out of pique with Atlanta's black Democratic elite, Abernathy backed Ronald Reagan, only to be denied a position in the Administration. Then, in 1987, he became the vice president of the American Freedom Coalition, an unsavory right-wing group linked to Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.

One would have expected Abernathy, in other words, to use his autobiography to vent his bitterness and to express his regrets. While there are some regrets, there are no signs of bitterness. This is a calm, occasionally eloquent account of the rise of the civil rights movement. Abernathy's portrait of King, somewhat obscured by the censorious furor over his revelations about King's sexual exploits, is admiring and revealing. And Abernathy's account of the movement's early days testifies to the extent to which the most important social movement of our era grew out of the black middle class and their churches.

But there is something disconcerting about Abernathy's autobiography. He ignores, or glosses over, most of the controversial and painful episodes in his own life. Abernathy tells the reader, for instance, that King had two women on the night before he was killed, but he does not reveal that in 1958 a Montgomery man tried to kill him, Abernathy, after learning that Abernathy was having an affair with his wife. The incident was widely known at the time. It was politically and personally embarrassing, because the man was put on trial for assault, but was acquitted after his wife confirmed that she and Abernathy had performed "natural and unnatural" acts. Similarly, Abernathy also makes no mention whatsoever of his roaring feud in the early 1970s with Jesse Jackson and Coretta Scott King, or his later clashes with Andrew Young and the Kings, or his experience in the American Freedom Coalition.

The inclusion of the sensational material about King combined with the exclusion of the politically significant and no less sensational material about Abernathy casts an eerie light on his book. And its *New York Times Magazine*-style prose leaves little trace of an earthy Baptist preacher given to florid oratory. Some might worry, therefore, about the book's authenticity. Is *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* Abernathy's contribution to the history of the civil rights movement, or a carefully constructed media event in which Abernathy himself merely played a major role? We may never know, but it is safe to say that whatever is valuable in this book is contained in its first two-thirds, in which Abernathy describes his own upbringing and the beginnings of the civil rights movement.

Like King, Abernathy was born into a relatively well-to-do family. But unlike King's father, who was a prominent minister in Atlanta, Abernathy's was a farmer, with 500 acres in rural west-central Alabama. "We never wanted for any of life's necessities," Abernathy writes. "Everything I learned about the Great Depression was from a college textbook." Because of his "privileged status," Abernathy also didn't experience the kind of brutal racism that other Southern blacks did. "In a rural area where land was available to people who were willing to work for it, it was possible for a few blacks to enjoy both freedom and a kind of equality."

Abernathy's background was important in two ways. First, while Abernathy didn't experience the full thrust of Southern racism, he also didn't grow up accepting the lowly status of blacks as a natural, rather than a social, condition. This made him more ready to protest racial injustice when he encountered it. Second, Abernathy's model of emancipation was always rooted in the experience of the self-sufficient farmer rather than the urban wage-laborer—a factor that became important in explaining his political difficulties when the focus of the civil rights movement shifted to the Northern urban working class.

The civil rights movement began in Montgomery, where Abernathy went to college after leaving the Army, and where he became the minister of the First Baptist Church in 1952. Abernathy joined other young blacks in protesting the constant humiliation that the city's blacks were subjected to. The Montgomery bus system was a particularly sore point. Bus drivers regularly insulted black patrons, forcing them to pay at the front and then to re-enter the bus through the back, and demanding that they give up their seats if any white patrons would have to stand. When Rosa Parks, a seamstress, was arrested on De-

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cember 1, 1955, for refusing to give up her seat, Abernathy and King, who had become minister of Montgomery's Dexter Avenue Church, became the leaders of a fateful bus boycott.

Abernathy first met King in 1950 when Abernathy, an Atlanta University graduate student, went to listen to a sermon given by the young seminarian. The next week King walked off with Abernathy's date. After receiving a Ph.D. in theology from Boston University, King came to Montgomery in 1954 as a minister, and he and Abernathy became close friends, dining together with their families every night. According to Abernathy, King, concerned about his parish duties, was initially reluctant to become involved in the bus boycott and only accepted the presidency of their new organization, the Montgomery Improvement Association, after two other candidates failed to win the approval of the city's leading blacks.

As King's biographers have recounted, Abernathy later became extremely jealous of King. In this book, however, Abernathy faithfully portrays King as his superior in leadership and intellect. In Montgomery, Abernathy writes, King "provided the philosophical framework" for the movement. Abernathy describes himself as a loyal tactician. "As Martin expounded philosophy, I saw its practical application on the local level." If anything, Abernathy credits King with too much philosophical precocity. In Abernathy's account, King had acquired his strategy of Gandhian nonviolence before the boycott began, but David Garrow and Taylor Branch have shown that King only began to translate what he first called "passive resistance" into Gandhi's nonviolence under the influence of Bayard Rustin, Glenn Smiley, and Harris Wofford. Abernathy's King is shorn of his Eastern, and his white, connections.

Abernathy also portrays King as a man who was haunted, sometimes paralyzed, by a fear of assassination. King slept little in his last years, and was sometimes bedridden at the height of conflicts with a mysterious stomach virus. By the time of his assassination in Memphis in 1968, he had become overwrought, fearful of bombs whenever he boarded an airplane. It is important to know this about King. In *Bearing the Cross*, Garrow attached great importance to the role that a religious experience in Montgomery played in fortifying King, but Abernathy's account shows the degree to which King constantly acted in spite of inner turmoil and physical illness.

Abernathy's King also has a decidedly human side. A public saint, he was a pri-

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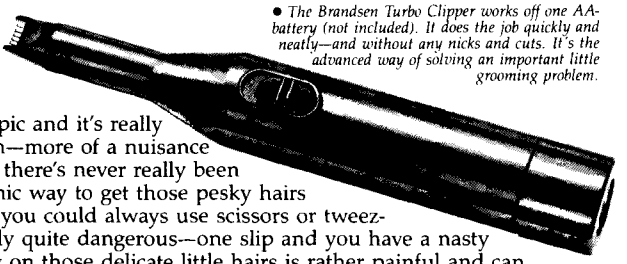

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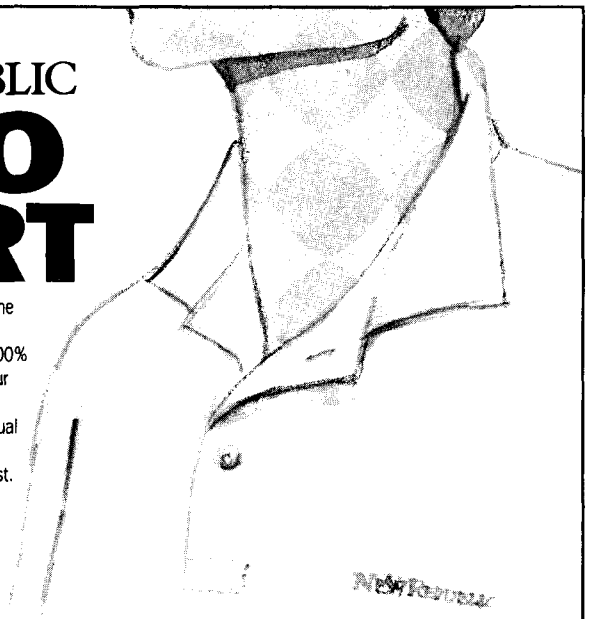

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vate sinner. Away from marches and demonstrations, he was a notorious skirt-chaser who refused to end his exploits even when it was clear that J. Edgar Hoover was shadowing him. (Abernathy does not speculate, but one wonders whether King's public dangers spurred him to take private risks.) King was also a talented mimic and storyteller. "I'm convinced that if he had wanted to be a stand-up comic he could have been almost as famous in that role," Abernathy writes. King was a man of large, sometimes unruly appetites and multifaceted talents, who at great personal price channeled those energies and skills into a highly principled public struggle for social justice.

Abernathy is at his best portraying the strategy of the Southern civil rights movement, which grew directly out of the Montgomery bus boycott but was refined further by Rustin and other movement theoreticians. Gandhi's philosophical influence on King is probably overrated. The teachings of Gandhi reinforced notions that King had already partially developed. King, Abernathy, and the SCLC relied on the political isolation and the provincialism of the Deep South, and on the ubiquity of modern television, to win national support for their demands. If they encouraged nonviolence from their followers, they hoped for violence from their opponents: it would dramatize the issue to a national audience. In Birmingham, Abernathy recounts, Sheriff Bull Connor's "dogs and [water] hoses had proven invaluable to us in mustering national support for demands. Had someone more prudent and more credible been in charge, it would probably have taken us twice as long to whip up public indignation."

King and Abernathy's strategy appears obvious now, but at the time it was extremely controversial among black activists. It deeply offended movement radicals, who believed that blacks should fight back. In Selma, after civil rights protesters were clubbed and gassed when they attempted to march to Montgomery for voting rights, even the arch-moderate NAACP called on blacks to go underground and to shoot back. But King and Abernathy insisted that the Selma protests remain nonviolent.

The SCLC strategy also appeared cruel and cynical to some activists. In his memoir, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, former SNCC executive secretary James Forman recalls the SCLC's Birmingham leadership "jumping up and down, elated" that police brutality was inspiring a movement. "They brought out the dogs. We've got a movement," Forman recalls SCLC leaders saying. "It was a disgusting moment to me," he comments, "for it seemed very cold, cruel, and calculating." But the strategy worked brilliantly, bringing down the segregationist South as no other might have. It took genius to conceive it, and courage and self-discipline to carry it out.

A strategy aimed at securing constitutional rights for Southern blacks did not fare well in the North, though, where grievances were more complicated and more intractable, where the movement could not summon a latent majority on behalf of its goals. As King and Abernathy tried to bring the SCLC to Chicago, where they agitated for open housing, and to Memphis, where they supported black garbagemen's wage demands, they encountered a situation much more similar to traditional labor struggles, in which the outcome depended upon the power that each side could muster. King, who was raised in the South's most modern city and who was very influenced by Christian socialists during his seminary days, was ready to make the transition to a different kind of urban, working-class civil rights movement, but Abernathy was not.

Abernathy did not reject King's attempt to reorient the movement, but after King was murdered he was unable to carry on King's work. Abernathy's attempt to win new poverty relief through the poor people's campaign climaxed in the fiasco of Resurrection City in Washington in 1969, where a civil rights encampment was transformed almost overnight into an urban ghetto with feuding ethnic groups and roving teenage gangs. Abernathy continued to involve the SCLC in labor struggles, but he did so, he admits, "because Martin had given his life during such a confrontation."

Abernathy also lacked his friend's charisma and decisiveness. During the 1970s the beefy Abernathy became known as the "Charlie Brown of the civil rights movement." Abernathy, the journalist Barbara Reynolds wrote in 1975, "seemed to fit into the prophetic wisdom of an ancient Chinese proverb: there are two ways to destroy a person, either by digging a hole and letting him fall into it, or by building a mountain, perching him on top of it, and allowing him to fall off." Two individuals in particular made Abernathy's fall likely. From the moment of King's death, Jesse Jackson appeared determined either to take over the SCLC or to create an operation of his own that no longer required the SCLC's sponsorship. Abernathy was no match for Jackson's guile or charisma. Jackson finally resigned in 1971, taking the SCLC's Chicago staff with him. The SCLC's national leadership accused Jackson of taking SCLC funds as well. "We will not accept the resignation of the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson until he gives an accounting of hundreds of thousands of dollars," Abernathy thundered in vain.

Abernathy also failed to maintain the support of Coretta Scott King. After King's death, contributions poured into the SCLC, but they were to King rather than to the organization, and Coretta Scott King used most of them to establish a multimillion-dollar King Center in Atlanta.

At the SCLC's peak, its budget had been over $1 million with 175 full-time staff members, but by 1973 it was only bringing in $75,000 a year to support 20 demoralized staff members. Abernathy announced his resignation that year, but then he changed his mind when faced with the prospect of Jackson's return to the SCLC. In 1977 the SCLC's board members finally forced Abernathy to resign.

Abernathy's devotion to civil rights has remain unquestioned during his last years, but he appears to have allowed his running battle with Atlanta's black elite, and his desire to regain influence and stature, to cloud his political judgment. In 1976, miffed that Carter had courted Andrew Young and the Kings and not him, Abernathy made no endorsement in the Presidential contest. When he ran for Young's Congressional seat the next year, Young and the Kings endorsed John Lewis rather than Abernathy. Abernathy said at the time of former co-worker Young's endorsement, "I was surprised and let down because I have known him as a Christian individual." In the primary, Abernathy got 3,614 votes out of more than 200,000 cast.

In the 1980 Presidential contest, Abernathy first backed Kennedy against Carter in the primary, and then, at the Republican convention in Detroit, he astonished other black leaders by endorsing Reagan. In his memoir, Abernathy attributes his decision to his admiration of Reagan's workfare program in California, but he appears to have been moved more by spite against Carter, Young, and the Kings.

After Reagan won, Abernathy gloated that he and not his Atlanta rivals would now have influence in the White House. "I don't want to sound boastful, but I could pick up the phone now and call Mr. Reagan," Abernathy told the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* in March 1981. As Abernathy admits, however, he failed

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to get Reagan or anyone else from the Administration on the phone, and was never even considered for the Civil Rights Commission. In 1984, when Young and the Kings backed Walter Mondale, Abernathy switched to his old nemesis Jackson, chairing Jackson's Georgia campaign. In 1986, on the first celebration of King's birthday as a national holiday, Coretta King gracelessly omitted Abernathy, who had first proposed the event in 1970, from the 31-person board.

In 1987 Abernathy agreed to become vice president of the American Freedom Coalition, which several New Right evangelicals, working closely with Sun Myung Moon's closest aide, Col. Bo Hi Pak, had formed. Few of the coalition's members or officers knew of the church's role. In November 1988, former *Washington Times* reporter Edmund Jacoby wrote a devastating exposé of the church and its various front organizations for the Washington magazine *Regardie's*. Jacoby related that the Freedom Coalition had lured Abernathy with $3,000 fees for speaking engagements, four times Abernathy's usual rate. A month later Jacoby received a letter from Abernathy accusing him and *Regardie's* of "hateful treatment" and racism.

Jacoby had tried unsuccessfully to interview Abernathy for his article, and finally tracked him down at a Chicago hotel room. There Abernathy admitted that the letter had been written not by him, but by "Reverend [Jim] Bevel and some other people in the Unification Church." In February Abernathy, who claimed he had been previously unaware of the Unification Church's teachings, told Jacoby that he was submitting his resignation to the AFC, but in March he sent Jacoby a copy of a letter to the AFC's chairman canceling his resignation. Jacoby noted, however, that the signatures on the two letters did not match. Abernathy is still listed as the AFC's vice president.

Abernathy as portrayed by Jacoby—indecisive, almost incoherent, an easy prey for religio-political entrepreneurs—seems hardly capable of writing a serious work on the history of the civil rights movement. Still, individuals can sometimes lift themselves out of their present swamp to reflect on their past. In *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down*, Abernathy may have transcended the ignominy of his recent years. But then, not entirely.

JOHN B. JUDIS is senior editor of *In These Times* and the author of *William F. Buckley, Jr.: Patron Saint of the Conservatives* (Simon and Schuster).

Treasure of the Sierra Padre

BY DAVID THOMSON

The Hustons by Lawrence Grobel

(Scribners, 812 pp., $24.95)

John Huston survived as a legend in his own lifetime, however tough it was on others. When he was dead, his colleague and admirer Robert Mitchum warned, "They'd better drive a stake through his heart." Huston's best friends had felt the harsh breath of the Devil, a tranquil appetite for experience that ignored caution or conscience, even if it left the man as gaunt as a castaway. Huston was a terror, and such an actor. Who ever knew if his ruthlessness was him or a style? He urged pretense into his movies the way some fathers will energy on their children. It was the height of forgetfulness in Huston to let anyone else be Ahab in *Moby Dick*. Once he conceded the obstacles to playing the whale, however, his interest may have waned.

People were telling stories about John Huston decades before his death; and those collected tales harmonized with the official stories he delivered, the movies. The first good book about the making of a film, Lillian Ross's *Picture*, treated Huston's *Red Badge of Courage*. Her book was better than the film, with no character more intriguing than the dreamy, laconic Huston, who deserted one foundering Civil War ship to go off to Africa for big game and the successful sinking of *The African Queen*.

Huston never claimed that pictures were the sole object of his exercise. He was interested in such larger things as horses, painting, backgammon, women, and playing the devil. "The idea of devoting myself to a single pursuit in life is unthinkable," he said, and there were those who reckoned he was more loyal to animals, shady jockeys, lost causes, and chance encounters than to his dependents. When a man is so attuned to audience, does anyone ever get close to him?

Men's men esteemed his wandering, careless adventures. Men wary of women rejoiced in the gossip's catalog of Huston's conquests, and in the peace of mind with which he folded one hand and dealt another. Women were wind for his sails, indifferent to his age, his serene ugliness, or his mean turns. He had a great act, he knew how to play a man suddenly enchanted, and he could do it with the previous woman still in the room. But then, like any man who measured his own fraudulence, he lost faith in conquests and began to grow scornful; the leathery satyr still called them "dear" and "darling," but searched for fresh quarry. Even the initially disapproving Katharine Hepburn found herself yielding. She understood that Huston dominated his surroundings by behaving like a child. Still, he lured the hidden mother in her, the slave ready for an infant tyrant.

Gamblers cherished Huston for his insouciance; not even a life in show business had made money stick to him. Movie professionals honored him for the droll, eloquent contempt in which he held Hollywood. Who was not drawn to that rare alchemy of confidence without vanity—the modest assurance, the politeness wreathed in hell's smoke? Few moviegoers would survey his work without recalling treasures side-by-side with dross. Even those who had been injured by his cruelty remained fascinated by the angelic smile and the wizard's voice. He was hired to narrate solemn documentaries on history and destiny, and to sigh the soothing words that sold mineral water on television. That voice was everywhere, so beguiling, so availably ardent. It served as God and Noah in *The Bible* and as Noah Cross in *Chinatown*, with an unchanging, lilting awe for both creation and destruction.

In the spring of 1986, this John Huston was 79. He had been compelled into a bleak but amusing exchange: for giving up "Havana cigars, maidens, vodka martinis, and the midnight hours," he received the cold, firm, and faithful comfort of an oxygen cylinder—and the opportunity to make rueful jokes about his deal. He had emphysema; he was dying; and yet he might have died long before. He was battered sinew and paper skin, and he was lucky—for he had never bothered to take care of himself. In his blithe view of fatality, where was the point? Dust would have its day. So, spared, surprised, still curious and un-

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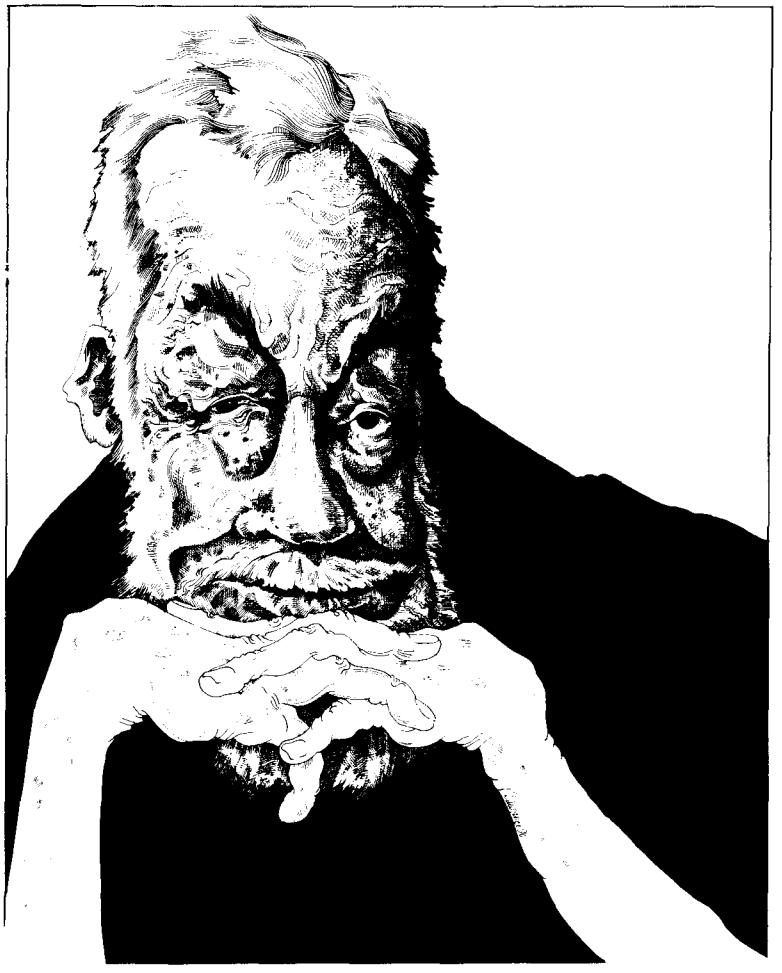
flappable, he gave interviews on how he planned to play his demise: "I hope death approaches me very quietly, touches me with a sleeve, says lie down, puts its fingers over my eyes." He had a scene and a mood in mind—like the scraps of paper fluttering in the blast when Louis Calhern shoots himself in *The Asphalt Jungle*.

Well, this spring day he was drowsy, maybe a little buzzed on oxygen. The TV popped up one of the Dodge commercials for which Huston had lately done the voice-over as if it were the Gettysburg Address. Half-asleep, the director's horny ears pricked up; recognition had slipped back beyond immediate sense into the inheritance of acting. "Whoever's speaking," Huston opined, "has been listening to my father."

He meant Walter Huston, that exceptional actor of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, the one-time vaudevillian who transformed himself for Eugene O'Neill and Sinclair Lewis; who played heroes or villains but seldom without hints of the other; who helped establish modern American character acting. Walter also played the archetypal old-timer in John's *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, the dedicated philosophical prospector who laughs in ecstatic, fierce glee—the laugh of chaos come again—when the wind disperses his precious gold dust. This old-timer knows that search can then begin again; he is fulfilled and revivified. For in being a prospector, he means to show men how completely earthly hope and purpose are confounded. He has no anger or despair; he is Satan enough to have outgrown those youthful fits.

That hearing of the father, and the apparent failure to recognize himself, is one marvelous story among thousands in Lawrence Grobel's feast of a book. Like most of the stories, it manages to sound plausible and scripted. We have the incident, presumably, because Grobel was there in the room. But in that case Huston knew he was there, and maybe was fashioning a scene as touching as Walter's soft, reverent singing of "September Song." Does such a speculation seem indecent? If so, we miss the point in Huston and his Hollywood. For this was a man most moved by, and most sincere in, scenes. He was always scanning life for the gold of what played well. As Orson Welles once put it, John Huston was Mephistopheles to his own Faust—not just protagonist but master of the show. John loved the performance his father gave, loved the idea of him. As to the real man, the real father, who ever knows about such things, he might have chuckled.

The title of Grobel's engrossing book is off-putting; it seems to threaten the lavish, humbug togetherness of a photo album. But the heart of Grobel's work is a multifaceted account of parents and children thrown inescapably together, notwithstanding all urges to escape. There is no other level of attention that will bring readers to such a turmoil of feelings about John Huston, for it is in their supposedly intimate affairs that actors may have to own up to being shams and scoundrels. We may not like this, since we treasure actors for what they teach us about intimacy. It is a fearsome lesson for actors' kin: that performance relies on the kindness of strangers.



JOHN HUSTON BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Grobel is an ingenious but careful provoker of talk. He has met just about everyone who loved and suffered from John Huston, including his fifth wife. Grobel has proceeded in the spirit of a prudent hunter in search of elusive prey, of a chameleon with claws, of a beast born wounded and thus constitutionally dangerous. He understands the history of the species and the nature of its habitat. Best of all, he does not shoot to kill. He has no urge to judge. Is a rogue lion wicked? Or is it enough to describe his marauding in detail?

The Hustons began in long talks with Huston. Grobel was told to be candid and fearless, and to make up his own mind: that was the way by which Huston wanted to be known. Already, however, there had been a Huston autobiography, *An Open Book*, in 1980, so fitful in its coverage and its flavor that some doubted that he had written it all himself. Huston was less the inhabitant of this life than its airy, absentee landlord—an attitude his children might have recognized. In his book, he did not even name his fifth wife, though he likened her to a sea snake and a crocodile. *An Open Book* refrained "from making any dark disclosures regarding my secret life. My misdeeds are not sufficiently evil to justify their being put on display." Thus, with jocular apology, Huston slipped off the hook.

The distance he preferred was understandable. Huston was averse to analysis, reflection, guilt, and thinking badly of himself. He was the least likely director for *Freud*, or for Montgomery Clift's tortured attempts at the role. Neurotics were never Huston's guys. He admired people who presented themselves all on the surface in a knockout close-up. His own face had that brazen swagger, and he shared it with the world in his rapacious noticing. He saw things so we remembered them: like that moment in *The Asphalt Jungle* when Sterling Hayden rests a vial of nitroglycerine in the crown of his beaten-up fedora.

Shark-like, Huston felt a duty to press on, with life and the narrative line. Boredom threatened him more than anxiety or remorse. But the darker side, the per-

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verse depths, confounded wives, lovers, and children; and it may be the highest tribute to Grobel that those intimates will gain most from his book. Huston had many secret lives, and those close to him deserve this full accounting. Grobel has described an endless raconteur, a chronically inventive man, a selfish manipulator, a wise, brave ghost who was likely truer to himself than any other Hollywood phantom.

There is no doubting the mutual affection of Walter and John, who had not spent much time together until John was grown up. Walter was a full-time actor and much less secure than his son. But John valued him as much as anyone in his life, and John's remorseless standards shone forth in *Sierra Madre*. Whereas, for years, John seems to have been doubtful of Anjelica: he put her in one of his films, *A Walk with Love and Death*, when she was a novice, exposed her, treated her badly (he seldom gave actors much direction), seemed to know in advance that she would look inadequate.

That is just one instance of Huston's toughness with the children. For a start, he adopted waifs—Pablo, a Mexican boy, without any warning to his then wife, Evelyn Keyes; and Allegra, the child his next wife, Ricki Soma, had in an affair with another man. In addition, there were Tony and Anjelica, John's children by Ricki; and Danny, the son he had in an affair with Zoe Sallis. Huston embraced and then rebuffed; it seems likely that he treasured most the women he did not marry, such as Marietta Tree and Suzanne Flon. Grobel reports the impression of several women that Huston's mother had chilled his heart for lasting ties, though he is cautious about taking this fact for an answer. Anyway, an answer is less valuable than a clear view of a man who often seemed ready to live in his own harem, and yet was puzzled when rivals' feelings where hurt. He might keep several cats and horses, after all, and never hear jealousy from them.

Time passed, and if John Huston never mellowed, still there came the chance for Anjelica to do Maerose in *Prizzi's Honor*, for Tony to write the screenplay for *The Dead*, and for Danny to have his moment with *Mr. North*. No one of them, I think, is up to Huston's best: *Prizzi's Honor* is absent-minded and disordered, and *The Dead* is quite simply ungraspable on film, as the literate Huston must have guessed. But the children can make their own way now, and perhaps they breathe easier knowing they no longer have to be as good as Walter or as charming as John. For, in truth, John Huston probably did love his animals as much as his children—and would have played that line as a compliment to the kids. He never believed in depleting obligations. He never really believed in anything except the laughter that greets the dashing of all hopes.

Which brings one to the question of Huston's work, and where it stands. He would not have disputed the claim that he had made many middling, poor, or bad pictures: *In This Our Life*; *We Were Strangers*; *Red Badge of Courage*; *Moulin Rouge*; *The Barbarian and the Geisha*; *The Roots of Heaven*; *The List of Adrian Messenger*; *The Bible*; *Sinful Davey*; *A Walk with Love and Death*; *The Mackintosh Man*; *Phobia*; *Victory*; *Annie*; *Under the Volcano*. But failure did not startle or shame him. Nor did it slow the pace or the relish of his advance. Films were not the sacred cause they are supposed to be for auteurs. He never had patience for sitting in the editing room with them. Toward the end, he beheld the set more as an amiable observer than a decisive director.

He came on like a hard case, able to crack jokes and sit up over cards and booze with tycoons or camera crews. Yet he had lofty literary ambitions. Who else could have brought Dashiell Hammett, B. Traven, Stephen Crane, Melville, Arthur Miller, Sartre, Tennessee Williams, Carson McCullers, Kipling, Flannery O'Connor, Malcolm Lowry, and James Joyce to the screen—while getting Hollywood to pay for it? Do not underestimate the valor, the cunning, the devilry, the masked high-mindedness of a man capable of shafting that system with those authors.

There is a proper comparison to be made between Huston and Welles. They were of the same generation, had the same greed for all the rest of life beyond movies; they were ready to do almost everything on a picture; they were directors deeply swayed by acting's excitement; they were notorious public voices; they had the same ruined laugh. Welles asked Huston to play the movie director in *The Other Side of the Wind*, one of many ventures not brought to completion. Huston's projects never stopped in their tracks; he was too much the professional. Welles could not endure Hollywood or bring himself to finish films, and made himself an outcast. But Huston never forsook the whoring of the business. He expected ruin, whereas Welles yearned for Xanadu. Huston saw Sam Spiegel screw him on the profits from *The African Queen*, yet he was not shattered or dismayed. Indeed, it only confirmed him, because he wanted to be the unfunded stoic played by his father in *Treasure*.

In so many of Huston's best pictures, there is this pattern of some great undertaking coming to grief. That's what Huston did with *The Maltese Falcon*. Gently, he opened up Hammett's original so that

The Cloud of Unknowing

Took off on time, and over the Gold Coast
saw Lake Michigan evaporating
in veils of fog, and the fog similarly
ascending into clouds. We're in the clouds

now, United Flight 406, and a large man is consumed
by reciprocal trade, — "Our soybeans,
their labor!" Isn't electricity
running inside others, this animal fear

alternating with awe? We are flying
inside mother-of-pearl clouds, and our iced drinks
do not tremble. Big Jim is laughing
open-mouthed, silent, to what we hope

are a comedian's words inside his headphones.
Somewhere someone must be spinning a prayer wheel,
and we fly on into a cloud, a stately
pleasure dome. "What keeps us here?" the Khan asks.

Lake Michigan flashes sunlight from its face,
and a long ore boat pulls the widening
V of its wake, floating on nothing
but water, and all of the words for water.

Dennis Finnell

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Bogart's Sam Spade could be infected by the absurd, obsessive treasure hunt of Sydney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre. He kept Greenstreet's Gutman alive (Hammett killed him off, but Huston fell for the fat man's blarney, and for Greenstreet's huge daintiness). And Huston adopted the line Bogart is supposed to have suggested, about the falcon being the stuff dreams are made of. One reel more and Spade, disillusioned with women, would have joined the gang in its quest for fool's treasure.

Sierra Madre is the next move in that game. Then came *The Asphalt Jungle*, gritty but romantic, in which Sam Jaffe's dour mastermind is nabbed because he waits a moment too long watching a cute girl dancing. In *Beat the Devil*, everyone lies, as if to cover for a script being made up as the shooting went along; it is the Falcon gang again, with Robert Morley replacing Greenstreet. *Moby Dick* is about failed expedition and fated destruction. *The Misfits* is more forlorn. Those cowboys lacked Huston's verve and directness; the film is burdened with Arthur Miller's faraway sense of Nevada, and with his longing to explain Marilyn Monroe. *Fat City* and *The Man Who Would Be King* are the final studies of glory briefly held before it turns to ashes. They both walk the gamblers' wavy line where bums might become dukes. (Fat City is a true Hustonian ideal.)

All that is an extraordinary collection of quirky entertainments. I doubt there are great films there, though one or two may be "perfect." They are no match for *Citizen Kane* or *The Magnificent Ambersons*. There is too little vulnerability for tragedy in Huston's work, just as there is hardly a love affair that he lets us (or himself) take seriously. Driven by sex in life, Huston mocks love on screen. All these futile ventures he celebrates are metaphors for striving in Hollywood. For he knew he was working in a place where good work was un-American, where it was essential to conceal noble intent in the cynic's snarl.

In so many people, that sneer changes the face, and the mind behind it. But disguise did not destroy Huston. He pulled off a coup: he was what Hollywood wanted in a man and a director, yet he was a darling of those who disapproved of the system. Though always in demand, he rarely made hits; and he preferred to live in Ireland or Mexico. The studios may have trusted "old John," but maybe they never noticed how odd and unnerving the films were. Who else could have made *Wise Blood* or *Beat the Devil*? The deceit fueled the demon in him. And sometimes Huston was not comfortable staying the amiable fatalist; sometimes he needed to scourge and to poison. In Grobel's book several people notice a desolation within Huston's bonhomie. There was a desert behind his eyes.

Yet often enough he did good and very good work, movies that remain fresh, funny, and vivid. More than that, John Huston stirred good people. I can think of many things not his in conception, yet unimaginable without him. For example, Noah Cross in *Chinatown*, the discreet lord of LA and seducer of his own daughter. The film was directed by Roman Polanski and written by Robert Towne, worthy colleagues. Huston might have said that he just did a decent acting job. But it was he who brought Satan to so many moments, coolly wondering whether Jake Gittes was yet sleeping with his daughter (when Jack Nicholson was just starting his romance with Anjelica), speaking with rapture about the moral abyss: "You see, Mr. Gittes, most people never have to face the fact that at the right time and right place, they're capable of anything."

Other actors would have played that line sinister. Huston made it wistful and forgiving. He grasped that almost the only way to make a serious picture in Hollywood was as black comedy. He probably chuckled after every good take, savoring the fearful line. No one has ever been more frightening in an American film.

DAVID THOMSON's new novel, *Silver Light*, will be published in the spring by Knopf. He is working on the life of David O. Selznick.

Gone with the Whim

BY LAWRENCE FREEDMAN

A Shield in Space?: Technology, Politics and the Strategic Defense Initiative by Sanford Lakoff and Herbert S. York

(University of California Press, 450 pp., $35)

Almost seven years have now passed since March 23, 1983, when Ronald Reagan made one of the most memorable statements of any modern Presidency. At the dog end of a speech intended to muster support for his defense budget, he suddenly asked:

> What if free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant retaliation to deter a Soviet attack, but on the knowledge that we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our soil?

It was not exactly a rhetorical question. He then called upon the nation's scientific and engineering communities to see if this dream could be realized. Reagan did not explain how this might be done, but it was suggested in background briefings that the President had in mind the use of space and directed-energy weapons.

The time that has elapsed since that ambitious statement is slightly longer than the time it took to fight the Second World War (at least over here in Europe). During the course of that war, jet aircraft, cruise and ballistic missiles, and atom bombs were developed, and saw their first operational use. The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), if not quite offered as the moral equivalent of war, was certainly presented as a national effort on the scale of the Manhattan Project, which produced the first atom bombs, or the Apollo Project, which landed the first man on the Moon. Both of those projects succeeded within a comparatively short period. SDI has been responsible for progress in a number of areas of defense-related research, but its basic goal remains as distant as ever. SDI was intended to conclude the nuclear age, but it has notably failed to do so; and the sort of proposals now being put forward in the name of strategic defense offer no escape from the condition of mutual assured destruction.

The Reagan Administration immediately became trapped by its own exaggerated rhetoric. Spokesmen waxed indignant at those who questioned the worth of the initiative, as if the critics were misanthropes eager to obstruct the best escape from the nuclear threat, and countered sustained criticism from scientific experts by pointing to instances in which experts had been wrong, as if that was a reasoned response. The effort to sustain the myth of a path-breaking enterprise that would transform the strate-

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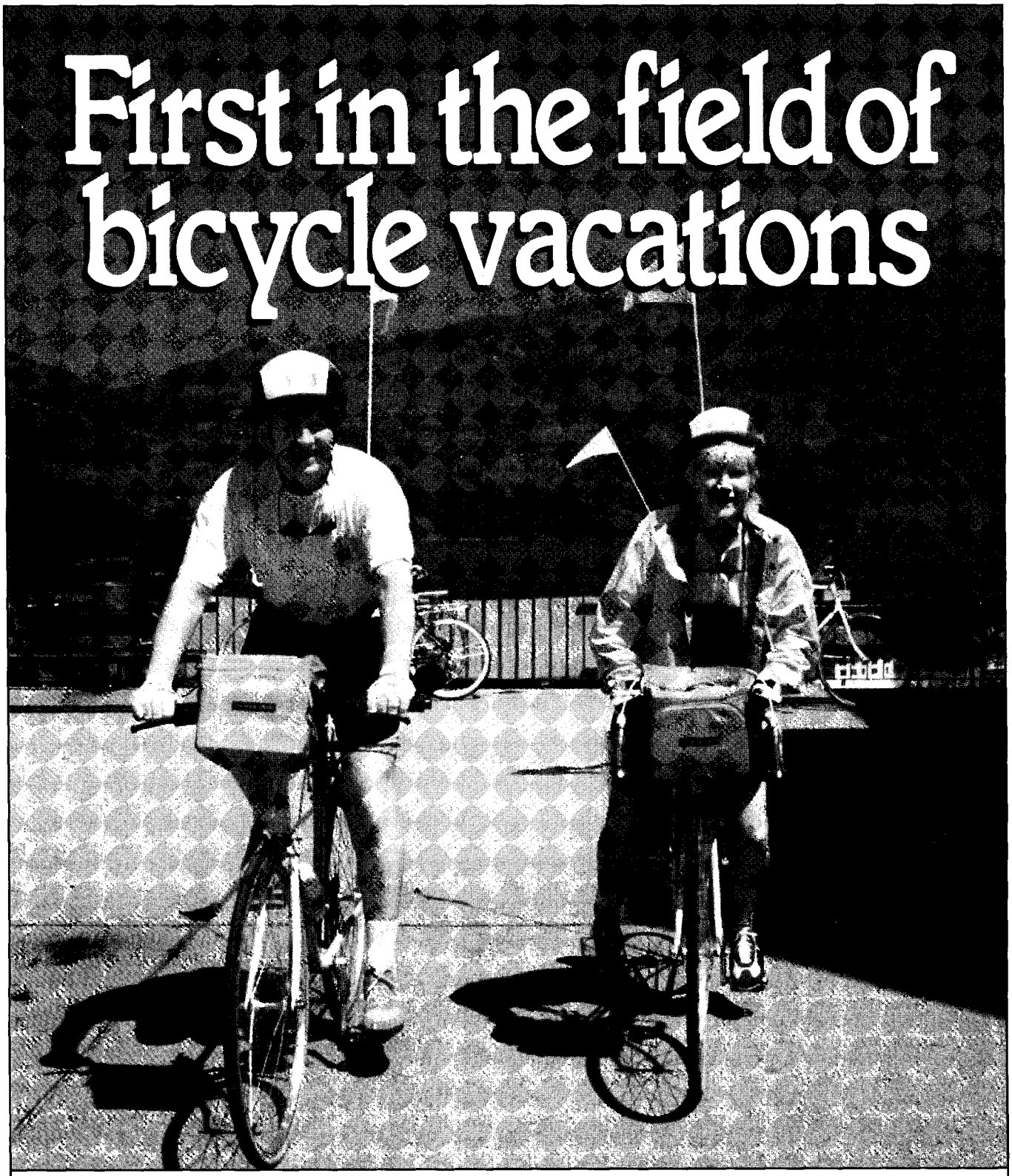

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gic environment led the Administration to accept the high opportunity costs of misdirected scientific talent and defense dollars, to forgo opportunities for arms control, to attempt an outrageous reinterpretation of the provision of the 1972 ABM Treaty. Surely it would have been much easier to admit on the morning of March 24, 1983 that the President "misspoke." It would not have been the first time.

But, as his small group of advisers understood, Reagan's speech was the only way such a scheme could be launched. It was the only way to bounce the bureaucracy into supporting something that would have never survived the processes of internal review to which major programs are normally subjected. The problem with the executive branch of the American Government is not that it is equipped for the analysis of every problem from every conceivable angle, which can allow policy-makers to be fully informed, but that the policy-making process is dominated by furious interagency bargaining, which compromises the analysis and tends to produce bland consensus. A radical departure, therefore, must be organized almost as a Presidential conspiracy against the bureaucracy. (George Bush's May 1989 initiative on conventional force reductions was organized in much the same way as the "Star Wars" speech.)

It is one thing to impose a strong political line in an effort to overcome official inertia, and quite another to organize a policy coup on behalf of a series of controversial scientific and technological propositions that amount to a revolution in the foundations of American security policy. Yet this is what Reagan did. Although careful to insist that he was only asking for a major research effort, he was in fact demanding of the scientific community that they examine a series of hypotheses that had already been discredited, in support of a goal that could change as the Soviet Union responded to the American program and altered the character of its threat.

The underlying theme of SDI—protecting rather than avenging—was fine in principle, but it contradicted the theory of deterrence, which had grasped that in the nuclear age the threat of avenging might be the best form of protecting. Of course, many were unhappy, in the United States and in NATO, with such a fragile form of deterrence, and proponents of SDI claimed that they were answering the concerns of the Catholic bishops, for example, whose pastoral letter had drawn attention to the moral dilemmas associated with deterrence. (Before SDI, some of the same people had attacked the bishops for meddling in national security.) But few moral or strategic problems can respond to a technical fix; and deterrence was no exception.

Not surprisingly, the program was in intellectual trouble before too long. When the bureaucracy was asked to turn the President's vision into concrete plans, expert panels were established. These indicated that if the vision was to be realized, it would require extraordinary expenditure over many years, as well as cooperation from the Soviet Union in keeping the "threat" manageable. Or, alternatively, if there was to be an early shift in the structure of American forces toward defensive systems, then the vision would need to be modified, and something more modest—say, defending only key military assets—introduced instead.

This confusion over basic objectives was only one of many confusions to afflict the dream. There were others. If it was so essential to protect people, why was the initiative confined to ballistic missiles, when cruise missiles and strategic aircraft were equally capable of unthinkable destruction? And how could the proponents of SDI be so optimistic when they could not even agree among themselves about the most likely shape of a working system?

Edward Teller has been a great fan of X-ray lasers. His protégé George Keyworth, who was the President's science adviser at the time and wrote key portions of the March 1983 statement, preferred lasers beamed off space-based mirrors to missiles in their boost-phase. The High Frontier group, which for years had been lobbying for this sort of initiative, liked more readily available kinetic weapons on satellites. The Fletcher Panel, which was established to design a program that would give substance to the President's vision, wanted more than a single technology; it directed that all possibilities should be fully explored, that preparations be made to intercept a missile throughout the whole of its trajectory rather than rely upon stopping it decisively at one point. By now the more futuristic "kill mechanisms" have lost ground. The current favorite involves sprinkling space with hundreds of thousands of small, self-contained kinetic interceptors, known as "brilliant pebbles." It is extremely hard to take this seriously.

And yet SDI survives, albeit in an attenuated form. Its political endurance ensures that it will be remembered as a supreme example of Presidential power. If Reagan had not been seized by the idea, not even the Pentagon under Caspar Weinberger could have come up with something so flimsy. And since SDI was one of the few things that Reagan really cared about, nobody dared tell him that it was a load of nonsense. When he rode high, SDI rode high with him. And when he faltered as a result of the Iran-*contra* affair, SDI faltered too. Now the SDI budget is watched by conservatives, who are vigilant for signs of any attempt to dismantle the Reagan legacy, but the program is a shadow of its former self; and President Bush seems to be looking to space exploration to provide America's high-technology companies with the major, high-profile program without which, we are told, they are incapable of prospering.

One of America's most distinguished scientist-politicians, who had been active in the campaign against anti-ballistic missiles (the forerunner of SDI) in the late 1960s, once told me that the moment he read about SDI, he decided that he was not going to waste his time and his energy refuting something so patently absurd. Few others have followed his course. SDI was, in its way, both heat-seeking and light-seeking. It became an incitement to the scientific community. Scientists produced thousands of brilliant pebbles of their own, striking the concept at every one of its many vulnerable points. Never has so much been written by so many about so little. Learned societies have organized expert panels, packed with Nobel laureates, to examine the Administration's case and pronounce it wanting, almost always in measured language backed by exhaustive technical analysis, replete with diagrams and graphs and complex calculations. The books of these conferences and symposia still trickle out. At last they are valuable mainly as period pieces.

It is impossible to know whether SDI would have faltered without the sheer weight of independent criticism to which it was subjected. The original concept contained such basic contradictions, I think, that technical problems and budgetary implications would have led to its diminishment eventually. It is now generally accepted that, until Gorbachev realized the folly of his approach, the extent of Soviet hostility was one of SDI's greatest attractions: "If it won't work, why are the Russians so worried?" It turned out, of course, that the Russians were worried, but about things much more fundamental than SDI.

SDI is not the story of an irresistible technology boosted by self-seeking scientific advisers and defense contractors. It is the story of a political whim. Its fate was eventually determined primarily by

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the balance of political forces, and the independent experts were only one among many contributors to the balance. This, at any rate, is what I conclude from this excellent book by Sanford Lakoff and Herbert York. They tell the tale of SDI as completely as one would wish, and take the reader through the various arguments for and against. Few know more about science policy in general, and strategic arms policy in particular, than these two authors. They write authoritatively and lucidly.

Lakoff and York do not quite seem to have made up their minds about the ends of their book. Are they taking part in a debate or providing the history of one? In fact, they are accomplishing a bit of both. Their sober tone requires that all sorts of fanciful ideas, whose flaws are now familiar, are accorded the dignity of a careful and systematic investigation. The authors use their discussion of the substance of the ideas behind SDI to remind us of the twists, the turns, and the tangents that this odd controversy has taken: the path from Reagan's personal interest in a simple answer to the vexing problem of America's vulnerability to the March 1983 speech; the attempts to discredit scientific opponents by challenging the integrity of their calculations, and the tendency of those opponents to find polemics irresistible; the reinterpretation of the terms of the ABM Treaty so that it need not be abrogated to allow the testing of new strategic defenses to proceed; the search for a way of using SDI for some advantage in arms control negotiations without being obliged to abandon it; the offer of contracts to skeptical allies who feared being left behind as American contractors enjoyed a high-tech bonanza.

Lakoff and York's underlying purpose is to use the case of SDI as a general warning against the quest for a technological fix to security problems. There is a critical difference between problems that pit man against nature and problems that pit man against man. Like all reasonable men, they do not argue, as part of their skepticism about SDI, against efforts to determine the feasibility of defenses against nuclear attack; we must be sure that we are not obstructing a truly significant discovery. Yet they hold out little hope for success, and they are wise to warn that the effort must never be allowed to foster expensive illusions, and never suffice as an alternative to addressing directly the grimly intractable dilemmas of safety in the nuclear age.

LAWRENCE FREEDMAN is the author of *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (St. Martin's Press).

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 6*

solved the futures market and index arbitrage from any significant degree of blame for the crash or subsequent market volatility. Cramer claims not to be a Luddite, but his arguments against the "users of computers" sound reminiscent of the debates in Congress following the 1929 crash to restrict the use of telephones to trade stock. Tom Allen recently wrote: "If slowing things down could reduce volatility, stone tablets should become the trade ticket of the future." Maybe it's time for Cramer to put away his chisel.

JONATHAN D. MUEHL
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

James J. Cramer replies:
Mr. Muehl's letter is shocking not only for its all-too-typical denials from program traders—he is one, though he fails to mention it—but because it shows how out of touch the SEC's Mr. Corkran is with today's markets. None of the brokerage houses contacted by the press has denied this kind of shorting; in fact, until the October 23 mini-crash the major firms routinely carried out short sales without upticks. Mr. Muehl and Mr. Corkran should talk to traders at these big houses. They'd learn how fast stocks go down when brokerages take advantage of the SEC's loophole, even as the SEC denies that such a loophole exists.

Stopped watch

To the editors:
The Russian watch sold at Bloomies's, etc. (Notebook, December 11), is properly transliterated as "Rakieta," or "Rocket." I bought one in Warsaw in October 1973; it stopped in January 1974.

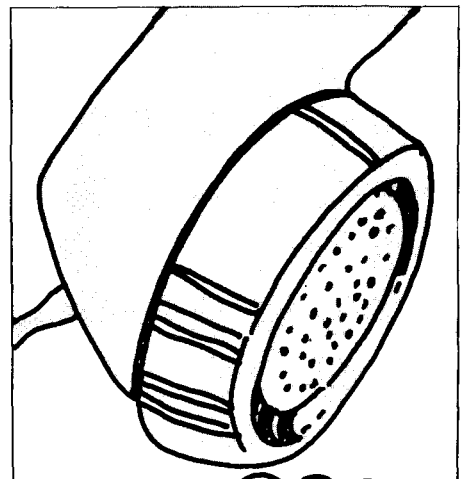
In those days a huge "Rakieta" neon clock glowed over Warsaw's Constitution Square, its hands moving freely and exuberantly in defiance of the laws of dialectical materialism. "The Russians," said the loyal Poles, "build the biggest and fastest watches in the world."

HARRY KOPP
Washington, D.C.

Owner error

To the editors:
Many middle-aged editors know that the *Detroit Free Press* is owned by Knight-Ridder, not Scripps-Howard, as noted by TRB ("Corporate Luddism," December 25).

JOSEPH D. COX JR.
Duluth, Minnesota



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REYKJAVIK DIARIST

More car trouble

IN ICELAND, CRIME IS PRETTY much non-existent, unless you include the prices, like four dollars for a head of lettuce and $120 for a frozen turkey. To be strictly accurate, it's violent crime that's negligible: in this country of some 250,000 people, about two murders are committed each year. Of course, statistics are little comfort if you happen to fall on the wrong side of them. Just the other day, our car was stolen. Actually, this didn't surprise us too much. We had left the doors unlocked and the keys in the ignition. Or, more accurately again, we had left one broken key in the ignition. Two weeks before, as my husband attempted to start the car with my key (which I knew was bent but had done nothing about), he discovered he was holding only two-thirds of a key in his hand, like a cracked tooth. The tip of the key wouldn't come out of the lock, which meant we couldn't use his key either. In the morning, to our delight, we found that by jiggling the broken key in the lock to connect it with the lodged tip, we could start the car. Was this a miracle? If we removed the broken key, would we ever start the car again? We left it in. After nearly a year of living in Iceland, and of parking an unlocked car on main streets in its capital city, we'd grown trustful.

BOTH MY HUSBAND AND I ARE poets, with the excuse-making that entails. Neither of us ever performs even the easiest practical task that can be avoided. The one light bulb in our kitchen blew out last July (an uncanny month of 24-hour daylight dimmed by perpetual rain clouds), and we didn't bother changing it until September. To be fair, my husband did, on the 13th day after the key broke, visit a locksmith, who said we'd need a mechanic to remove the lock-cylinder first. Tomorrow, we said (first thing!), we'll do that. But the next afternoon, the car was no longer parked in front of our apartment building. It's our own fault! we said. We also said: it was an old, cheap car, and it always stalled. And: we're moving back to America in a month anyway, so who cares? And: what a great city, where you can leave the key in your car for two weeks!

I FOUND MYSELF FEELING strangely nostalgic, though, about a car that had brought us what you might call colorful trouble. There was the time it got stuck in the ice in front of the President of Iceland's house; she emerged bearing a snow shovel. There were the five or six times during the ceaseless light of summer when my husband or I, dutifully remembering Iceland's law requiring headlights to be used at all times, forgot that you don't have to keep them on after you park. (Each jump-start, which taxi drivers here are cheerfully used to providing, cost ten dollars.) There was the Sunday morning I found a drunken, sleeping teenager jackknifed over the baby's car seat. When I called the police, they were a marvel of forbearance: a man and a woman escorted the boy, who remained as quiet and unruffled as they, into a paddy wagon, and nobody even asked me why I didn't lock my car. (Because when you locked the doors, they wouldn't always *un*lock. We meant to get that fixed. . . .) There was the morning we liked the police less well: they had stolen our license plates while we slept, and just because we hadn't managed to get the car inspected.

BASICALLY A FAN OF THE REYKJAvik police, however, I gave them a call. The man who answered spoke perfect English, as a high percentage of Icelanders do, and asked me to come into the station. I strolled the baby into a large, empty, linoleum-tiled lobby and waited for the middle-aged policeman seated behind a desk (and beneath what I suppose was the police seal, picturing a shield with two crossed spears that put me in mind of Vikings) to finish a phone conversation. In Iceland—at the bank, the post office, the grocery store—you rarely have to wait long, if at all. The man recognized my story and led us to a back office. On the way, we passed an unpeopled staff lounge where I glimpsed two low tables with chessboards, games apparently in progress, and, on the wall, photos of the Reykjavik force in 1975-76. (A distinguished year?) The policeman began recording the salient facts, embarrassing as they were, on a typewriter fitted with Icelandic letters like "thorn" and "eth." The room, like many in Reykjavik, had a sublime view of wind-buffeted clouds and of the snowcapped mountains across Faxa Bay. The day before, at the dentist's office, I had enjoyed a similar prospect, with one cluttering detail: a construction crane on a spit of land in the bay was swinging up and down, double-jointedly, like the arm of a dentist's drill. Now, as if inspired by the storybook seascape in front of him, the policeman volunteered a benign surprise: "We almost always find the car," he said.

"Really? How long does it usually take?"

"Oh, within 24 hours. They can't go far here."

"But it's usually vandalized?"

He shrugged. "Of course."

Somewhat heartened, I took the baby home. She had fallen asleep, and so I left her just outside the front door, below our dining room window. You might think that someone whose car had just been stolen would not leave her baby to nap outdoors, in a vehicle that could be wheeled away without a key. But I had learned, months before, to do this; every mother does, in Iceland. It's for the baby's health.

AN HOUR OR SO LATER, THE phone rang. A man asked in English if I was missing a car with license plate number 05324. Yes. Did the car have a baby seat? Yes. I hadn't called the police, had I? Yes, I had. Long pause. It now dawned on me that I was not talking to the police. Casually, I asked the man if he happened to know where our car was. In the middle of town, he said. What street? It was hard to explain, he said. Another pause. I'm actually a member of a special investigative force of the police, the man said, and I'll contact the station now. He hung up. I called the police and got my friend. Special investigative force? he said. It took me longer than you might think to figure out that this "special force" probably consisted of the young thief's horrified father. It came to me about the time when my friend at the station called back. The real police had found the car—in good shape, it seemed—just a few blocks from our apartment, and it was now being towed to the station, where we could pick it up. The whole episode—from our discovery of the car's theft to its recovery—had taken four hours.

I RUSHED DOWNSTAIRS TO TAKE the baby back to the station. Dressed in a diaper, long thermal underwear, socks, cotton turtleneck, corduroy overalls, sheepskin hat, sheepskin boots, mittens, and hooded goose-down snowsuit, and stuffed into a fake-fur *poka* (a sort of forked body-muff that lines her stroller), she was still sleeping, red-cheeked and seemingly very content. She looked cushioned—as most of us in Iceland are, one way or another—against the cold, cruel world.

MARY JO SALTER

Mary Jo Salter recently published her second book of poems, *Unfinished Painting* (Knopf), and a children's book, *The Moon Comes Home* (Knopf).

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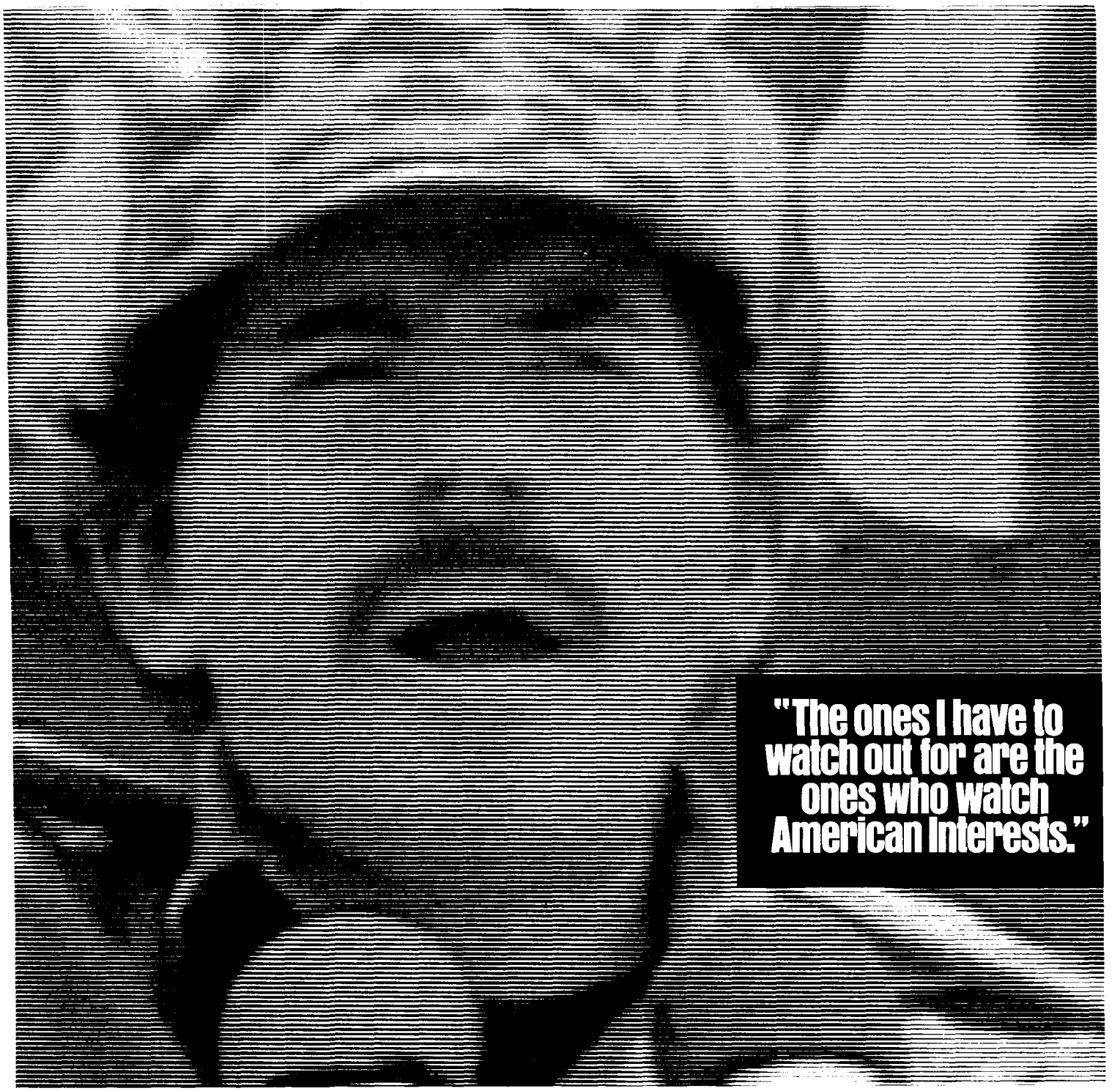

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